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THE  
EPISODE OF THE DONNA PIETOSA,

BEING AN ATTEMPT TO RECONCILE THE STATEMENTS IN  
THE VITA NUOVA AND THE CONVITO CONCERNING  
DANTE'S LIFE IN THE YEARS AFTER THE  
DEATH OF BEATRICE  
AND BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE DIVINA COMMEDIA.

DANTE PRIZE ESSAY,

1888.

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THE  
EPISODE OF THE DONNA PIETOSA.

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I.

WHEN WERE THE VITA NUOVA AND THE CONVITO  
WRITTEN?

IT is of importance to know to what part of Dante's life we are to assign the Convito and the Vita Nuova. That the verse of the latter was written on the occasions mentioned in the commentary, there can be no doubt; but it is not easy to determine the date or dates at which the prose portion—the commentary which connects the poems—was written. In the Convito (i. 1), Dante says that the Vita Nuova was written at the entrance of his youth: “E io in quella [la V. N.] dinanzi all' entrata di mia gioventute parlai e in questa [il Convito] di poi quella già trapassata.” This statement is slightly ambiguous. “Dinanzi all' entrata,” etc., may mean “*before* the entrance of my youth,” or, as Todeschini says, *dinanzi* and *di poi* may be “two adverbs used to give greater precision to the idea of the pronouns *quella* and *questa* ;”<sup>1</sup> so that the statement is really: “Ed io in quella, dinanzi *nominata* [Vita Nuova], parlai all' entrata di mia gioventute ;” which means that the book was written *at* the beginning of Dante's youth. Fortunately, however, the ambiguity of the passage cannot lead us far astray, and for the present we

<sup>1</sup> Scritti su Dante (Vincenza, 1872), ii. 112. See also D'Ancona, *La Vita Nuova* (2d ed., Pisa, 1884), p. xx; and Lubin, *Dante spiegato con Dante* (Trieste, 1884), p. 85.

will not attempt to determine whether Dante wrote the *Vita Nuova* *before* the beginning of his youth, or *at* the beginning of his youth.

In the fourth book of the *Convito* (chapter xxiv.) Dante says that youth begins with the twenty-fifth year. It should be observed here that the Italians seem to make no distinction between the cardinal and the ordinal numerals when speaking of age. "In his fortieth year," for instance, is equivalent to "when he was forty years old."<sup>1</sup> We may assume, therefore, that Dante wrote the *Vita Nuova* when he was about twenty-five years old. Boccaccio, too, asserts that Dante wrote "quasi nel suo ventesimosesto anno,"<sup>2</sup> when he was almost twenty-six, and while his tears for Beatrice still flowed ("duranti ancora le lagrime della sua morta Beatrice"). Since Beatrice died June 9, 1290, and Dante was twenty-six in or about May, 1291, we infer that Boccaccio meant by "almost in his twenty-sixth year," the first part of 1291. Dante was then "at the entrance of his youth." Boccaccio, however, is not to be quoted as a trustworthy authority. In this instance it is easy to see how he got the date of the *Vita Nuova*. It was written while Dante's tears for his lady were still flowing, — that was evident from the narrative itself, — hence it was written some months after the death of Beatrice, or, almost in Dante's twenty-sixth year.<sup>3</sup> We have, then, Dante's own statement that he wrote the *Vita Nuova* before or at the beginning of his youth, — which, if Dante used the term "youth" in the precise sense in which he afterwards defined it, would fix the date somewhere in the years 1290 or 1291. We have also a statement of Boccaccio's, not to be depended upon entirely, which

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the use of numerals in Boccaccio's *Vita di Dante*; and in Bartoli, *Storia della lett. ital.*, v. chap. 2. Cf. Filippo Villani, *de Vita et Moribus Dantis*: "Obiit poeta . . . vitæ suæ anno sexto et quinquagesimo."

<sup>2</sup> *Vita di Dante*, per cura di B. Gamba (Venezia, 1825), p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> On the worth of Boccaccio's *Vita* in general, see Th. Paur, *Ueber die Quellen zur Lebensgeschichte Dante's* (Görlitz, 1862), pp. 8 ff.

agrees with what Dante says, and further limits the time to the spring of 1291.

On the other hand, there are allusions in the Vita Nuova which testify to a later date. In chapter thirty-five Dante says that he was in a certain place June 9, 1291. After that he passed through various experiences, which we shall discuss a little later; finally he speaks of seeing certain pilgrims "in quel tempo che molta gente andava per vedere quella imagine benedetta, la quale Gesù Cristo lasciò a noi per esempio della sua bellissima figura;"<sup>1</sup> that is, "la Veronica del sudario di Cristo."<sup>2</sup> Until recently the best commentators have agreed in regarding this passage as a direct reference to the special exhibitions of the Veronica at the Jubilee, which began at Christmas, 1299.<sup>3</sup> Late investigations, however, show that the most important manuscripts read *va* instead of *andava*; that is, "at that time when many people *go* to Rome," and not "at that time when many people *were going* to Rome."<sup>4</sup> It follows from this and from indications afforded by ecclesiastical chronicles, that the reference is absolutely indefinite, and, far from indicating the pilgrimage during the Jubilee of 1300, may refer to any pilgrimage of any year.<sup>5</sup>

In the last chapter of the Vita Nuova Dante speaks of a wonderful vision in which he saw things which made him resolve to speak no more of Beatrice until he could more worthily treat of her. This *mirabil visione* is usually taken to be the first idea of the Commedia. Hence this chapter, it

<sup>1</sup> Chapter xli.

<sup>2</sup> Giov. Villani, Cronica, viii. 36.

<sup>3</sup> See Witte, Dante-Forschungen, i. 147, 148, and Vita Nuova, p. 114, note; Norton, The New Life of Dante (1867), p. 114; Carducci, note in D'Ancona's Vita Nuova (1st ed.), pp. 122-3.

<sup>4</sup> Rajna, Per la data della Vita Nuova, etc., in the Giorn. stor. d. lett. ital., vol. vi. (1885), pp. 113 ff.

<sup>5</sup> See Todeschini, Scritti su Dante, ii. 94; Fornaciari, Studi su Dante (Milano, 1883), pp. 156-7; Casini's excellent edition of the Vita Nuova (Firenze, 1885), notes on pp. 199, 200. On the other side of the question, see Lubin, Dante spiegato con Dante, p. 95. Rajna, indeed, asserts that Dante's statement applies to any year *except* 1300. Cf. F. Macri-Leone's critical edition of Boccaccio's Vita di Dante (Firenze, 1888), p. 96.

is supposed, must have been written in or not long before 1300, the year in which the action of the *Commedia* is placed, and in which it has been assumed that the first conception of it entered Dante's mind. But there is nothing whatever to show that Dante had not conceived the idea of the *Commedia* before 1300.<sup>1</sup> Certainly such a conception of Beatrice as that in the *Commedia* is but a step from that in the allegorical *canzoni*, which were plainly written before 1300. Hence, in the first place, the words in question may possibly not refer to the first idea of the *Commedia*; secondly, even if they do so, there is no reason for ascribing definitely to a time not long before the year 1300 the conception of that idea; and, thirdly, even if the chapter be written in or near 1300, there is nothing improbable in the supposition that Dante added it as a conclusion to the *Vita Nuova*, "after the conception of the *Divina Commedia* had taken form in his imagination, in order to connect the work of his youth more directly, and in indissoluble relation, with the work of his maturer years."<sup>2</sup>

Another passage of importance in determining the date of the *Vita Nuova* is the reference to Guido Cavalcanti in chapter thirty-one. The book was written for him, — "questo primo mio amico, a cui ciò scrivo," — and hence it must have been written when he was alive. Now Cavalcanti died on the 27th or 28th of August, 1300, and both Witte and D'Ancona (as well as others) lay great stress on this.<sup>3</sup> The mention of Guido is, of course, of value only in proving that the book could not have been written after 1300.

To sum up, then: Dante said that he wrote the *Vita Nuova* at or near the beginning of his youth; that is, not far from the year 1290. A statement of Boccaccio's, not worthy of much credence, would limit the date to the early part of 1291. In the *Vita Nuova* itself there is a reference to June 9, 1291, and

<sup>1</sup> Casini, *Vita Nuova*, p. xix.

<sup>2</sup> Norton, *The New Life of Dante*, p. 115. Compare, on the other side, D'Ancona, *Vita Nuova* (2d ed.), pp. xviii f.

<sup>3</sup> Witte, *Vita Nuova*, p. xv; D'Ancona, *op. cit.*, p. xix.

to certain things which happened after that date. Certain references which were supposed to point clearly to 1299 and 1300 have been shown to be still indefinite. All the expressions of time in the last part of the *Vita Nuova* are indefinite, and the period covered may be months or years. These expressions of time can, however, be more exactly determined by comparison with the corresponding narrative in the *Convito*. In short, Dante says that he wrote the *Vita Nuova* not far from the year 1290, and there is no reason for supposing that the whole or any part of it (except, perhaps, the last chapter) was written so late as the last years of the century.

In the *Convito*, as in the *Vita Nuova*, we must distinguish between the dates of the *canzoni* and the date or dates of the commentaries which explain them. We will first consider the *canzoni*.

In *Paradise* Dante meets Carlo Martello, titular king of Hungary and son of Carlo II. of Naples. Early in 1294 Martello had spent "more than twenty days in Florence,"<sup>1</sup> and it is supposed that he then met and learned to love Dante. At any rate, the phrases which Dante uses in the passage referred to, show plainly the deep friendship between the king and the poet. How close this friendship was, it would be interesting to know, because it would help to determine the date of the *canzone*, "*Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete*," which Martello recalls to Dante in *Paradise*, and which serves as a text for the second division of the *Convito*.

"Noi ci volgiam coi principi celesti  
D' un giro, e d' un girare, e d' una sete,  
Ai quali tu del mondo già dicesti:  
*Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete*,"<sup>2</sup>

says the king to Dante, speaking of the whirling heaven of Venus. By the phrase "tu del mondo già dicesti" it may easily

<sup>1</sup> Villani, viii. 13. Not in 1295. Todeschini says in March, 1294: *Scritti su Dante*, i. 171 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradiso*, viii. 34-7.

be supposed that Martello refers to a song of Dante's which he himself knew ; indeed, it is not hard to believe that this was the king's favorite *canzone*, and that Dante, remembering his royal praise, and naturally reminded of his own poem of many years before by the *terzo ciel* to which in fancy he now came, brought together in the *Commedia* at the appropriate place the song and the friend with whom he associated it. If that be the case, the date of the *canzone* must have been before the death of Martello, which occurred early in 1295.<sup>1</sup>

The *canzone* in the third division of the *Convito* is also mentioned in the *Commedia* (*Purg.* ii. 106 ff.). Dante begs Casella, —

“ Se nuova legge non ti toglie  
Memoria o uso all' amoroso canto,  
Che mi solea quetar tutte mie voglie,  
Di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto  
L'anima mia, che con la sua persona  
Venendo qui, è affanata tanto.  
*Amor che nella mente mi ragiona,*  
Cominciò egli allor sì dolcemente,  
Che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.”

It follows that Casella himself had set the song to music, or was at least accustomed to sing it to Dante. Casella died in 1299 or 1300, as we learn from *Purg.* ii. 94 ff. ; hence the *canzone* must have been written in 1299 at the latest, and probably, as we shall see later, long before that.

There is nothing whatever to show the date of the third *canzone* of the *Convito*.<sup>2</sup> The contents of all three *canzoni*, however, as well as certain points in the prose portions of

<sup>1</sup> Wegele says that the *canzone* was written in 1294-95. Selmi concurs. Lubin tries to limit the time to December, 1294. Witte says, “ verso il Dicembre, 1294.” There are other considerations which enter into the argument. I shall discuss it fully when I come to speak of the chronology of the episode of the *donna gentile*.

<sup>2</sup> It must, of course, have preceded its own commentary. Fraticelli and others try in this way to fix a date for it.



the work, seem to prove that they followed one another at no very great interval of time. It is not impossible that a twelvemonth might cover the whole cycle of feeling which they express. Of the *canzoni*, then, the first was probably written not later than March, 1295, and the second not later than 1299; the third, as we shall see further on, need not have been written later than 1295-6.

As to the date of the prose of the *Convito* there is a great dispute. Even Bartoli, usually so clear in his statements, seems to have no definite opinion. In one place he says: "It appears that Dante began the *Convito* in his youth, that he continued it in his exile, and never completed it;"<sup>1</sup> and in another he refers with approbation to the opinion of Wegele. Now Wegele says plainly:<sup>2</sup> "Der Commentar selbst dagegen ist wahrscheinlich in der Zeit zwischen 1306 und 1308, und in der Reihenfolge geschrieben in welcher er vorliegt." Witte assigns it an even later date,<sup>3</sup> and Scartazzini in his earlier writings seemed to be of the same opinion.<sup>4</sup> Recently, however, the latter has changed his ground slightly:<sup>5</sup> "Basing their arguments on certain passages, some critics have tried to show that the third and fourth treatises were composed before Dante's banishment. If this opinion is erroneous, it certainly did not deserve the neglect with which it has been treated, for some of the observations on which it is based are certainly correct." And he concludes by admitting that certain passages of the *Convito* were without doubt composed in the last years of the thirteenth century.

On the other hand, Fraticelli, following Scolari, tries very

<sup>1</sup> Enc. Brit., xiii. 502.

<sup>2</sup> Dante Alighieri's Leben und Werke (Jena, 1879), pp. 195, 196.

<sup>3</sup> Dante-Forschungen, i. 176 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Dante Alighieri, seine Zeit, sein Leben und seine Werke (2d ed., Frankfurt a. M. 1879), pp. 329 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Scartazzini, Dante (Milano, 1883), ii. 55. Davidson's translation of the same (Boston, 1887), pp. 209 ff.

laboriously to prove that the first and third treatises were written in 1314, the other two in 1297-98;<sup>1</sup> and Selmi, in a very persuasive work,<sup>2</sup> upholds with great skill his opinion that the bulk of the *Convito* was written in 1298 or thereabouts, and that Dante made additions to it during his exile. D'Ancona,<sup>3</sup> Renier,<sup>4</sup> and Carducci<sup>5</sup> agree in the main with Selmi. The whole discussion involves too many points to be given in full, but a synopsis of the main arguments of the two parties will enable us to see where the burden of proof lies.

The first set of arguments which Fraticelli and Selmi bring forward consists of instances in which Dante is supposed to correct in the *Commedia* mistakes or misstatements which he had made in the *Convito*. In Par. xxii. 139-141, for instance, Dante says of the moon: —

"Vidi la figlia di Latona incensa  
Senza quell' ombra, che mi fu cagione  
Per che già la credetti rara e densa."

Now, in the *Convito* (ii. 14), Dante states at some length the very opinion which is mentioned here as false, and which Beatrice, in another passage of the *Commedia* (Par. ii. 46-148), refutes somewhat elaborately. Fraticelli's argument<sup>6</sup> is, then, that if Dante, writing as if he were in the year 1300, corrects mistaken notions which he once held as to the *macchie lunari*, these notions must have been held previous to 1300, and hence the second treatise of the *Convito*, in which this erroneous theory is stated, must have been written before 1300. The obvious reply to this is that though Dante

<sup>1</sup> Preface to the *Convito*, vol. iii. of *Opere minori* di Dante (Firenze, 1879), 5th ed., pp. 6 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Il Convito* (Torino, 1865).

<sup>3</sup> *La Vita Nuova* (1st ed.), p. xliii. n.

<sup>4</sup> *La Vita Nuova e la Fiammetta*, pp. 162 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Studi letterari* (Livorno, 1874), pp. 200 ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 8 ff.

feigned himself in the year 1300 so far as regarded the chronology of births, deaths, and historical events, the opinions of the *Commedia* about physics, astronomy, and philosophy were those held by him at the moment in which he wrote. For Dante to carry his feigning so far as to express in the *Commedia* only the opinions which he held in the spring of 1300 would have been impossible;<sup>1</sup> and a correction in the *Paradiso* of any statement found in the *Convito* merely shows that the *Convito* was written before the *Paradiso*, not that it was written before 1300.<sup>2</sup>

The second set of arguments is drawn from allusions in the *Convito* to persons as living who were really dead at the ordinary date given for the composition of the book, and similar alleged discrepancies. Asdente, the cobbler and prophet of Parma, whom Dante met in the *Inferno* (*Inf.* xx. 118), and who must therefore have been dead by 1300, is spoken of in the *Convito* as living (*Conv.* iv. 16): so Fraticelli and Selmi say.<sup>3</sup> But a careful examination of the passage shows that it does not necessarily imply that Asdente was then living, but that it refers to him simply as a notorious character,—whether alive or dead is not apparent. Supposing, however, that Dante did speak of him as alive, it follows, on the one hand, that Dante made a mistake either in the *Inferno*, where he said that Asdente was dead, or in the *Convito*, where he said that he was alive; or, on the other hand, that the passage in the *Convito* was written before 1300. So far as I know, there is nothing to show when Asdente really died.<sup>4</sup> Dante may have made a mistake in the *Inferno* about

<sup>1</sup> Cf. D'Ancona, *La Vita Nuova* (1st ed.), p. xliii. n.

<sup>2</sup> There are other slight points of difference between opinions expressed in the *Commedia* and opinions expressed in the *Convito*, but nothing that would seem to indicate a conscious correction of a former statement. See, however, Fraticelli, *Opere minori di Dante*, iii. 9, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Fraticelli, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Salembene mentions Asdente as living and famous in 1239: "Iste homo, praeter proprium nomen, quod est magister Beneventus, communiter appellatur

the death of this obscure cobbler: in that case Fraticelli's whole argument falls to the ground. He probably did not think of Asdente either as living or dead when he wrote the passage in the *Convito*: in that case also the whole argument proves worthless. Or, finally, there is a bare possibility that Dante mentions Asdente in the fourth book of the *Convito* as living. In that case, provided that Dante's memory had not played him false, there remains a slight argument in favor of the early date for the fourth book of the *Convito*.

Gherardo da Camino, to take another instance, is mentioned in *Purg.* xvi. 124, as living, and in the *Convito* (iv. 14) as dead. But if he was alive in 1300, why might he not be dead in 1306-8? But, says Fraticelli, Dante was wrong. Gherardo must have been dead in 1300. He had adult sons in 1254; he is not heard of after 1294: hence he must have died before 1300, and Dante for once made a mistake. Furthermore, since Gherardo must have died after 1294 and before 1300, Fraticelli would set as a convenient date 1297. Hence the fourth book of the *Convito*, which speaks of him as recently dead, must have been written shortly after 1297. This whole argument is weak. Dante did *not* speak of Gherardo in the *Convito* as if he had died recently. On the other hand, we have Dante's express statement that Gherardo was alive in 1300. In the absence of all proofs to the contrary, this fact alone would be conclusive, especially as there is evidence to show that Gherardo did not die until several years after 1300.<sup>1</sup>

Again, Guido Montefeltrano is called "il nobilissimo nostro" in the *Convito* (iv. 28); in the *Inferno* he is placed among Asdenti," etc., — quoted in Angeletti, *Cronologia delle opere minori di Dante, parte prima* (Città di Castello, 1886), p. 70, n. Benvenuto da Imola and Landino in their notes on *Inf.* xx. 118, mention him in connection with Frederick II. It seems to me probable that Asdente died some years before 1300.

<sup>1</sup> See Gaspary, *Geschichte der ital. Lit.*, i. 259. He seems to have authority for saying that Guido died in 1306. See also Angeletti, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-9.

the fraudulent (Inf. xxvii.). Fraticelli explains the contradiction as follows. Guido died in the latter part of 1298, in the full odor of sanctity, — *cordigliero* in the order of the Franciscan brothers, which he had entered in 1296. Dante, then, writing of him in 1298 in the *Convito*, naturally praises the old soldier who is ending his days peacefully in a monastery. Not long after Guido's death, however, Dante and all Italy knew of the disgraceful counsel he had given to Pope Boniface VIII. in 1297, — counsel which led to the shameful annihilation of Palestrina ;<sup>1</sup> and indignant at such a doublefaced act on the part of a man whom he thought retired from the world, he placed him with the fraudulent counsellors in the *Inferno*. Here there is a slight probability on the side of Fraticelli's argument ; but it might easily be that Dante, writing the *Convito* after 1300, could still call Guido "il nobilissimo nostro," and that it was not until later, and yet previously to the time when he wrote the twenty-seventh canto of the *Inferno*, that his opinion changed.<sup>2</sup>

So much for Fraticelli's arguments. Selmi has others, based largely on the mood in which Dante was when he wrote certain portions of the *Convito*. In the second book he is evidently thoroughly in sympathy with the *canzone* which he is annotating, and that does not usually happen when a poet reviews his work of ten or fifteen years before, especially when years bring with them so much of changing action and thought as they did for Dante at that period of his life. The third treatise, too, is different from the second, and bears the same relation to it that the *canzone* of the third treatise does to the *canzone* of the second treatise. In the third treatise Dante can even speak of Beatrice coldly. Love

<sup>1</sup> For authorities, see Scartazzini's *Divina Commedia*, note on Inf. xxvii. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Norton suggests that there is no serious difficulty in accounting for the two ways in which Dante mentions Guido Montefeltrano. Certain of his qualities Dante admired, and so he praised him as *il nobilissimo nostro*. There were others which were worthy of severest condemnation, and so he put him in the *Inferno*. Compare him, for instance, with General Lee.

is no longer the natural impulse of the gentle heart ; it is "unimento spirituale dell' anima e della cosa amata" (Conv. iii. 2) ; he himself has come "all' unimento della sua anima con questa gentil donna, nella quale della divina luce assai gli si mostrava." Add to this the splendid praises which he showers on philosophy, and think whether Dante could have written thus after the marvellous vision of Beatrice, while he was studying with all his strength to be fit to sing the praises "di quella benedetta Beatrice, la quale gloriosamente mira nella faccia di Colui, *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus*." Selmi denies that such a contradiction could be possible, and many agree with him ; but after all it is a matter of which we know nothing whatever. The man who could, by a continued effort of the imagination which has no superior in the world, put back time to the year 1300 and found on that date a whole vast scheme of the universe, could certainly, if it were necessary, put himself in the mood of ten years before. But even such a supposition is not necessary to explain the tone of the commentary to the Convito. In spite of the curious attempts of Scartazzini, we know nothing whatever about the mental life of Dante during a long period. That Dante from the *mirabil visione* to the day of his death kept his love — even his artist-love, *amor in rima* — firm for Beatrice, is a theory not to be held without many modifications. To say that even after 1300 the struggle between the idealized Beatrice and the *donna gentile* did not sometimes return, would be rash. Arguments, then, derived from the tone of the commentary to the Convito cannot be considered as of much weight.

Other arguments are based on a study of the language of the commentary. Selmi finds traces in the first treatise which show that it was written as a preface and in large part after the other treatises, which may indeed have been published without it.<sup>1</sup> In the fourth treatise he sees a change

<sup>1</sup> Selmi, *Il Convito*, pp. 38-40.

of mood and of language, and hence a lapse of time between the first twenty chapters and the remaining portion. The latter, like parts of the first treatise, he supposes to have been written after the exile.<sup>1</sup> So that, on the whole, Selmi's conclusions are,<sup>2</sup> that in the last years of the thirteenth century Dante conceived the plan of the *Convito* and wrote parts of it, "cominciando dal Trattato primo e seguitando con ordine al quarto." Interrupted by his growing responsibility in the affairs of the State, and later by his banishment, it was left untouched until some time during the first decade of the fourteenth century. Then Dante took up the work again, retouched the first, and completed the fourth treatise. His task was again interrupted, and, busied with the *Commedia*, he never returned to the *Convito*.

Against these doubtful arguments of Fraticelli and Selmi we have Dante's plain reference to his exile in the first treatise<sup>3</sup> and the minor indications in the latter part of the fourth,<sup>4</sup> the testimony of Villani,<sup>5</sup> the absence of a single well-proved indication of a date before the exile, the presence of certain references which indicate a date after 1306,<sup>6</sup> and finally Dante's own statement of the relation between the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convito*. According to that statement, Dante did not write the *Convito* in his youth, but in another age, — the manhood of his life.<sup>7</sup> It is true that this passage

<sup>1</sup> Selmi, *Il Convito*, early in the essay.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> *Convito*, i. 3, 4.

<sup>4</sup> See Selmi, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> *Istorie fiorentine*, ix. 136.

<sup>6</sup> Gaspary, *Geschichte der ital. Lit.*, i. 259 and note.

<sup>7</sup> *Convito*, i. 1. 'The much-disputed words, "E io in quella dinanzi all' entrata di mia gioventute parlai e in questa di poi quella già trapassata," are no doubt ambiguous in meaning. *Quella*, as D'Ancona and others point out, may refer to *entrata* or to *gioventute*. The clever device of Del Lungo to obviate the difficulty by supposing that *quella* should refer to *entrata*, and *entrata* be understood to mean the first half of youth, has received little favor at the hands of the Italians best qualified to understand the use of the word in Dante's time. See Bartoli, *Storia d. lett. ital.*, v. 179. But the sense of the context is clear. Dante writes *più virilmente*, as befits *una altra etade*.

may have been added, or rather inserted, at a late date ; but that is improbable. At all events, the burden of proof still falls on Fraticelli and his followers. On the face of the Convito everything points to a date in the first decade of the fourteenth century (probably 1306-1308) ; and the efforts to show by internal evidence that parts were composed before 1300, have been entirely unsuccessful.

In short, to sum up this long, and I fear tedious, discussion of the date of the prose portion of the Convito, we may conclude that it was not written before the exile. We have no right, then, to regard the Convito as in large part written before the Vita Nuova was finished ; and evidence taken from the Convito with regard to events that happened shortly after Beatrice's death must be used as evidence given ten years at least after the events themselves.

## II.

### CHARACTER OF THE REFERENCES TO DANTE'S LIFE IN THE VITA NUOVA AND THE CONVITO.

WE have satisfied ourselves so far as possible with regard to the dates at which the Vita Nuova and the Convito were composed, and thus gained a certain power over the materials which we shall have to handle ; for we know now, so far as can be known at present, to what period of Dante's life they belong. This knowledge will be of service in helping to determine the relative value of testimony from the two books. For the Vita Nuova dates from a period immediately following Dante's short love for the *donna pietosa* ; the Convito, on the other hand, was in all probability written from five to ten years after the beginning of the exile, and hence from ten to fifteen years after the episode of the *donna pietosa*. The former will then be more likely to share the mood of that



period of his life, and to give us an idea of how Dante instinctively thought and felt at that time ; the latter will give us the clearer, better-formulated ideas of a time of life more advanced.

Before, however, we quote passages from the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convito* as accurate statements made by Dante with regard to his own life, we must stop a moment to consider whether the *Vita Nuova* is a plain autobiography or an artfully arranged narrative resting more or less on facts, and whether or not Dante has told us the simple and whole truth about himself in the *Convito*. Until that is decided with regard to the *Vita Nuova*, we have no more right to quote from it to establish chronology or exact fact than we have to quote at random from the *Del Reggimento e dei Costumi delle Donne* of Francesco da Barberino, and depend upon the results as testimony to the author's life. An examination of the life and works of this very Francesco<sup>1</sup> shows the way in which it is necessary to understand the earlier works of his great contemporary, Dante. Francesco, too, belonged to the circle of poets and painters in Florence, and in his youth sent out verses to the great writers of the day, just as Dante did ; he too had his *donna*, who was always human in form, but in essence divine ; he had the same attraction towards Provençal literature and the school of Bologna. In his *Del Reggimento e dei Costumi delle Donne*—an Italian poem with a Latin translation and Latin notes—we find ourselves in full allegory sometimes, and allegory, too, that seems to take the form of autobiography. The time was full of art in literature ; the great impulse—so strong and sweet in the best days of Italy—to artistic treatment of subjects as distinguished from servile copying or rude chronicling, was already beginning to move men, and they were learning to mould the real experiences of

<sup>1</sup> Born near Florence in 1264, died in 1348. See Antoine Thomas, *Francesco da Barberino et la littérature provençale en Italie*. Paris, 1883.

life into a no less real ideal. In all the history of literature there is no task more fascinating than the tracing of this strong and delicate impulse from its origin in Provence, through its modifications in Sicily and Bologna and Umbria, to the founders of the *dolce stil nuovo*, among whom Dante was chief.<sup>1</sup> The Reggimento shows signs of all this; but in it we see too plainly the gap between Francesco's actual life and the conventional worship of his almost deified lady, *Sapienza*, or *Intelligenza*. In the *Vita Nuova*, a masterpiece of a master, we are dealing with a higher nature than that of Francesco. His petty notary's soul had not that living mysticism which we find ingrained in Dante's. The youth whose memories began with the ecstasies of the *Vita Nuova* had an organization of an infinitely finer cast. The clumsy ideal of Francesco is not to be compared with his. The vision of his childhood was either Beatrice, or found its embodiment in her, the *mirabile donna*, of whom he could say: "La sua imagine . . . tuttavia era di sì nobile virtù, che nulla volta sofferse che Amore mi reggesse senza il fedele consiglio della ragione." Chivalric love had in the *Vita Nuova* its crown just before it died forever. Instinctive to the *gentil core*, and cultivated in poetry more than in life, it finally became embodied in Dante in its highest form, for in him it was translated into acts. In him, even more than in Petrarch, we find the living expression of the Provençal chivalric sentiment tinged by the scholastic influence of Bologna and the mystic devotion of Umbria. Dante did not love Beatrice as a mortal maiden to be wooed and won. It was *amor in rima*. He thought it unbecoming to write of

<sup>1</sup> See Renier, *La Vita Nuova e la Fiammetta*; Carducci, *Dello svolgimento della letteratura nazionale* (in *Studi letterari*); Bartoli, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. iv.; Renier, *Il tipo estetico della donna nel medioevo* (Ancona, 1885); Gaspari, *Geschichte der ital. Lit.*, vol. i. chapters i.-x., with many references; D. G. Rossetti, *Dante and his Circle*. These all throw light on the interpretation of the *Vita Nuova*, — the simplest and the most puzzling of Dante's works.

her directly,<sup>1</sup> or by name. It was pure art-worship, — something half way between love and religion; a new art of life, like the living of a lyric, or a drama of passionate but mystic devotion.

Just what was the proportion between fact and idealization in Dante's love for Beatrice, it is not my duty to discuss here. It is evident, however, from the simplicity and directness of a part of the *Vita Nuova* that much must be literally true; and, on the other hand, the series of impossible visions, the evident influence of the schools of Provence and Bologna in the earlier love-lyrics, the series of constantly recurring cabalistic nines, the curious arrangement of the poems,<sup>2</sup> all tend to prove that Dante wished to produce an effect of symmetry which is not to be found in life. These hints and others are so strong that it is sometimes easy to believe that the *Vita Nuova* was written for adepts in love idealization, such as his friend Cavalcanti, and was intended as a sort of riddle for them, — a test question, like the first sonnet, "A ciascun' alma presa e gentil core." And so there have been many faithful students of Dante who have refused to believe in the reality of Beatrice.<sup>3</sup> As it is, however, the careful reader must see in Beatrice, I think, something real, and also a wonderfully beautiful idealization. The *dolce stil nuovo* was born. The reaction against stiff and academic models had begun. Conventional poetry was losing ground, and in its stead

<sup>1</sup> The same feeling among the Provençal poets is well known. See Diez, *Poesie der Troubadors*, edition of 1883, pp. 136-7, for other similarities between the lover in Provence and the lover in Italy.

<sup>2</sup> See Mr. Norton's *The New Life* (edition of 1867), pp. 117-18; and Witte, *Vita Nuova*, pp. xx f.

<sup>3</sup> Quite recently Professor Bartoli (*Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. iv. chapters viii.-x.; vol. v. chapters iii. and iv., *et passim*) has given a most telling argument for this view; and while the question has already been treated from almost every conceivable point of view, it is still possible that such investigations as he and Renier have begun into the growth of that new phase of Italian literature for which the *Vita Nuova* stands, may yet have some result in determining the full meaning of the book.

Dante created, as Carducci says,<sup>1</sup> “una poesia stupendamente immaginosa e patetica e profonda e solenne, sostituendo al sentimento cavalleresco il sentimento mistico.” And all the characteristics of this new style, this *new life*, are summed up in Beatrice. Through her Dante passed from the triviality of his early visions “alla continua e beata contemplazione della bellezza in ciò ch’ ell’ ha di più sovrasensibile.”<sup>2</sup>

This unreality, or suspicion of unreality, which hangs about the whole of the Vita Nuova, these many signs of the artfulness with which the whole work was constructed, cannot help having some influence upon its value to us as an autobiography of Dante. To make use of a parallel in modern literature, we might say that the Blessed Damozel of Dante Gabriel Rossetti has a great value as a work of art; it has a great value too in showing the way in which its author felt at the period in which he wrote it, and the sort of life which was his instinctive ideal: for it brings before us a man who, like his Chiaro, was of so sensitive a nature, so sympathetic to all forms of beauty, that he “would feel faint in sunsets and at the sight of stately persons.” But even if the Blessed Damozel and the sonnets of the House of Life were much richer in references to their author than they really are, how far could we trust them, unsupported by other authority, for an exact statement about Rossetti’s life and inner experiences? It is sometimes easy, it is true, to infer from the productions of an author the mood in which he was when he wrote, or even the corresponding incidents which were the base upon which his fancy built. But in other instances it is almost impossible to draw any sure inferences from the works themselves, unless they be well supported by outside testimony. One might as well try to determine and to reconstruct from the frost-paintings on the window-panes the nameless and noiseless forces which

<sup>1</sup> Studi letterari, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

produced them as to attempt to reconstruct from a poet's fancies his life and the impulses which had led him, sometimes by ways he knew not, to the final result.

As I have said, the Vita Nuova is far more a work of art than one may at first be inclined to imagine. It is true that it has the form of an autobiography ; but to the poet writing in the "heat and height of emotion," his past life does not seem a mere succession of facts : to him it is a series of living pictures, embodiments of emotions in incidents, the progression of events in an ideal way to an ideal end. That is the way in which a poet conceives of his life ; and in telling the story of it he would emphasize to an appropriate value certain significant incidents ; others, insignificant or misleading, he would turn so as to point them along the line of the ideal development which he had chosen ; and something which a common man might consider of primary importance he would omit altogether. In his mind, facts would acquire a certain perspective which they scarcely had in real life, and form and color and light and shade would all work at the artist's will. Chronology—a phantom of us moderns—and the influence of a history not yet born, could have no effect on the young Dante ; and in the Vita Nuova, in which he wrote *quasi sognando*, and with his eyes fixed on an ideal of beauty, we cannot hope to find always exact history or exact statements of time, as those who have tried to sift the testimony with regard to the reality of Beatrice know to their cost.

Fortunately for us, we have in the Convito a work of an entirely different kind. It is moved by nobler impulses than the Vita Nuova. To benefit mankind, to encourage noble virtues, to establish order, to check the wrangling of parties, the insolence of the foolish, and the hypocrisy of false learning, Dante decided to publish some treatises for the people. They were to consist, so far as the framework went, in the explanation of certain poems of his own which had been

much misunderstood. To see just what he meant by an explanation it is necessary to use a little thought and to follow carefully Dante's statement of his scheme.

There are four meanings which things may have, Dante says in the beginning of the *Convito* (ii. 1).<sup>1</sup> First, there is the literal meaning which things seem to have: so Orpheus, when you read about him, seems to have been a man who played so sweetly on the lyre that he drew after him beasts and birds and stones. In the same way, the literal meaning of the *Æneid* would be what to us is the natural meaning. Secondly, things may have an allegorical meaning: so allegorically and *really* (according to Dante), the story of Orpheus means that the wise man moves all things by the sweetness and power of his knowledge. The allegorical meaning of the *Æneid*, of the Bible, of the *Commedia*, is to Dante the important, the only real meaning. Thirdly, things may have a moral meaning. The story of the transfiguration of Christ teaches that just as he performed his rarest miracles before only three of his disciples, so "alle secretissime cose noi dovemo avere poco compagnia." Fourthly, things may have a spiritual meaning; and this we must be careful to distinguish from the allegorical meaning. The exodus of Israel from Egypt has a spiritual meaning to the soul: just as the Israelites endured certain trials, so must the soul endure certain corresponding trials. That is to say, *real* things (in the sense of "actual") have spiritual meanings. The flood, a comet, the history of the Roman Empire, all have a meaning of this sort; but in allegory the process is reversed. Here unreal things take on the form of reality. It is in this way that the *Divina Commedia* is written. The journey in the three worlds appears real, it takes the form of a reality. As a narrative of actual experiences

<sup>1</sup> These meanings, of course, were not original with Dante. They were taken from Thomas Aquinas and others. Full references will be found in Gaspary, *Geschichte der ital. Lit.*, vol. i., pp. 252 ff.; and p. 513, note to pp. 253, 254.

it has a certain charm for us ; but that is what Dante would have had us pleased with least. To him that is the unreal, the false, the literal meaning. Behind that is the true, the real, the allegorical meaning. This is the way, too, that the artists of the day went to work. The Triumph of Chastity and the Marriage of Poverty at Assisi, for instance, have each a literal meaning, inasmuch as in each there are actual figures represented,—men, women, and animals. The careless man, deceived by this imagery of action, may see nothing more; interested in what seems to be real, but which is really unreal representation, he forgets that the real object in each case was the presentation of an idea. The actual forms had not been portrayed in order that man might delight in them. The real, abstract idea had created for itself a new form. Hence it was the allegorical meaning that was true, the literal meaning that was false. The advantage of the Convito is, as we shall see, that it always distinguishes precisely between the literal meaning and the allegorical meaning, so that when it speaks of the *donna pietosa*, we can see plainly both the real, the allegorical meaning of the incident, and the unreal, the false, the literal meaning, which has so often deceived even close students of Dante.

It will be readily seen how fortunate it is that Dante has written at length in the Convito, both in prose and in verse, of the very episode of the *donna pietosa* which in prose and in verse forms the second part of the Vita Nuova. If the Vita Nuova is thoroughly artistic, full of hints which show us the natural working of Dante's mind, and hence is, from our present point of view, lacking in value as exact testimony, the Convito is in all respects its opposite. Its statements are plain and unequivocal, detailed and elaborate. The artist works by suggestion ; the philosopher must cover every point with exactitude, must excel in the division of his subject, and in an amplitude of illustration and explanation which leaves nothing weak or uncertain from beginning to end. These are

the characteristics of the Convito; and it will be seen at once how implicitly we can trust ourselves to it for the information which we desire. In it we can expect to find the clear and unambiguous ideas of a man in his prime, in distinction from the youthful dreams of the Vita Nuova. Our duty, then, is to examine, first, the testimony of the Convito about the epoch in Dante's life with which we are dealing, and afterwards the Vita Nuova, regarding it rather as a work of art than a real statement of facts, and judging its testimony rather with regard to its agreement or disagreement with that of the Convito than by any other standard.

### III.

#### THE DONNA PIETOSA IN THE CONVITO AND THE VITA NUOVA.

AFTER the general introduction to the Convito, which occupies the first treatise, Dante gives the text of the first *canzone*, "Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete," and proceeds at once to develop its literal and allegorical meanings. The exposition of the literal meaning naturally comes first. Some of the more important portions of it I shall give in Dante's own words.

"Dico che la stella di Venere due fiate era rivolta appresso lo trapassamento di quella Beatrice beata . . . quando quella gentil donna, di cui feci menzione nella fine della Vita Nuova, apparve primamente agli occhi miei, e prese alcuno luogo nella mia mente. E . . . più da sua gentilezza che da mia elezione, venne ch'io ad essere suo consentissi."<sup>1</sup> In fact, she showed such pity for his widowed life that the spirits of his eyes became great friends of hers, and his love for her grew and rivalled his love for Beatrice. The latter, however, still

<sup>1</sup> Convito ii. 2.



held the citadel of his heart, and a great strife began. Sight helped the one love, memory the other ; and the strange conflict seemed so wonderful and so hard to endure that, *quasi esclamando*, he wrote this *canzone* in protest to the powers of love who had sent him the new lady, the *donna pietosa*.

The literal meaning of the *canzone* is plain, but its true sense is not easy to find. Dante felt this himself, and added : —

“ Canzone, io credo che saranno radi  
 Color che tua ragione intendan bene.  
 . . . . .  
 Allor ti priego che ti riconforte  
 Dicendo lor, diletta mia novella :  
 Ponete mente almen com’ io son bella.”

It was the charm of the literal sense that would shut the eyes of the reader to the allegorical, — the “ *verità ascosa sotto bella menzogna*.”<sup>1</sup>

The exposition which Dante makes of the motives that led him, *quasi esclamando*, to address his protest to the powers of the heaven of Venus, is a perfectly explicit statement of the central literal meaning ; and its definiteness affords no small help in the search for the real meaning. The allegory must correspond with the lines of the narrative. The disposition to represent the ideals of the mind under the form of actual images was a marked trait of the poetic spirit of the time, and a comparison of the mode in which this was done in painting is often helpful when one is studying the early literature of Italy. What the literal meaning was to a poem, the apparent relation of the figures was to a fresco of the *trecento*. Imagine for an instant that we are standing before a painting where three figures are represented, — an angel, an earthly lady, and between them a young man. He has been gazing with rapt and sorrowful emotion on the angel ; but now the lady stands

<sup>1</sup> Convito ii. 1.

between them, and regards him with eyes full of sympathy.<sup>1</sup> If, then, the artist should tell us in brief the story of his painting, should explain to us the dramatic relation of these figures, that would be the literal meaning. He would say, for instance: This is a scene from a young man's life, — in fact, from my own life. This youth had loved, and when his lady died, he still worshipped her in heaven, until one day a maiden gazed on him with sympathy, and a love for her grew up within his heart. That would be a good subject for a painting or a story, and to-day that would be enough. In Dante's time such a meaning for a picture or for a story would not have been enough, for in the minds of the wise and foolish alike there existed a feeling that, particularly in the realm of art, all things had or should have an allegorical meaning when looked at with the eye of the understanding. It was in this way that the Bible and the *Æneid* were to be read; it was in this way that Dante intended the *Commedia* to be read.

Springing from this feeling, there followed a great development in the art of representing the ideal by the actual, of giving to a thought the form of life itself. We see this impulse bursting out in painting, in the frescos of Giotto and of the long line of masters that followed him and left such beautiful memorials of their imagination and their skill in a score of Tuscan and Umbrian towns, — their thoughts of death and life, of earth and heaven, all embodied inseparably in forms of life. Later this impulse lost itself in an intense interest in forms themselves, and by the time of Masaccio we have done with mysticism. This same impulse, this same development and change, we see in the literature of Italy. Close by the lyric, represented by the first part of the *Vita Nuova*, stands the desire to express a thought in the form of

<sup>1</sup> All this could of course be represented in those days in a single picture; for the artist never scrupled to introduce the same figure or group of figures several times in different positions, in order to show the progress of the narrative.

a person, as in the Convito and the greater part of the Commedia. This allegorical phase of art is plainly a strong trait of Dante's age, and it would be interesting to tarry a moment to give a satisfactory analysis of it; but we have already touched on the main point,—the insufficiency of the literal explanation, and the necessity of the allegorical explanation.

Returning now to the immediate matter, we have, parallel to the testimony of the commentary, that of the *canzone* itself. There the strife is still in progress, but the victory is already assured to the new lady. At first—the purport of the *canzone* is—the life of Dante's sorrowing heart used to be a sweet thought that led him to heaven, where the angel Beatrice was; but one appears who puts that thought to flight and turns his eyes to a lady—*fece una donna guardare*—and says:—

“ Chi veder vuol la salute,  
Faccia che gli occhi d' esta donna miri,  
S' egli non teme angoscia di sospiri.”

Then vanishes the sweet thought of the crowned angel in heaven; his soul weeps, and reproves him.<sup>1</sup> But he has looked and loved, and a voice says: “O weeping soul, lament not!”

“ Questa bella donna, che tu senti,  
Ha trasmutata . . . la tua vita.  
Mira quant' ella è pietosa ed umile,  
Saggia e cortese nella sua grandezza:  
E pensa di chiamarla donna omai.”

The commentary follows with long explanations and amplifications of the words of the *canzone*,—dissertations on the numbers of the heavens, the characteristics of the third heaven, and the qualities of its motion. The “*spirto*” of the first stanza is the constant impulse to praise the beauties of the new *donna*; and the *anima trista* is another impulse,—

<sup>1</sup> This is the first sign of the feeling that may have caused Dante to write the thirtieth canto of the Purgatorio.

really the prevailing one,—that, in opposition to the first, moves him to beautify by his praise the memory of his glorious Beatrice. Finally, after many long but not uninteresting remarks on all sorts of side issues, Dante closes the literal explanation and begins, in chapter thirteen, the *sposizione allegorica e vera*.

Here, as we might expect, we find the simplest and plainest possible account of what Dante really meant by the narrative of his love for the *donna pietosa*. Beginning again with the story of his love for Beatrice and his sorrow when she, “the first delight of his soul,” was taken away from him, he goes on to relate how after some time he began to seek consolation where alone he could find it,—in books. And so he set himself to reading that book of Boethius, not known to many, in writing which he, a prisoner and persecuted, consoled himself. Then hearing that Cicero had written another book in which, treating of friendship, he had touched on Lælius and the way in which Lælius consoled himself for the loss of his friend Scipio, Dante set to reading that. At first it was somewhat hard for him to understand these books (we must remember that he always searched in them for the hidden allegorical meaning); but he finally succeeded, for he had already had some training in such things,<sup>1</sup> and he was helped by his natural talents,—the faculty of the poet for defining and visualizing ideas,—“di mio ingegno,” as he says, “per lo quale molte cose, quasi come sognando, già veda: siccome nella Vita Nuova si può vedere.”<sup>2</sup> And as a man seeking silver finds gold, so he found not only solace for his tears, but references to many books. In short, he saw for the first time that there was such a thing as philosophy, that it

<sup>1</sup> It is almost impossible for us to realize the effect that the first reading of these books had on Dante, and the way in which he found it natural to understand them.

<sup>2</sup> The few phrases of the *Convito* and the *Vita Nuova* in which Dante describes his impulses to write, are among the most valuable hints we have as to his inner life. In the *Convito* (ii. 2) he says that he wrote the first *canzone* “quasi

was a great and noble effort towards the understanding and systematizing of the world, and that, what was nearer to the point, it was a poetic science. That his ideas of philosophy were not at all those of to-day, is evident enough. To him — to the Italian artist in a century when men were still anthropomorphic, and tried in many ways to give the abstract the form of the concrete, and to unreal things a real form, just as they gave to actual things an ideal meaning — to him philosophy seemed almost a person. Fresh from his idealizing fancies about Beatrice, fresh from the reading of Boethius, where Philosophy appears as a noble matron with comfort for the sad prisoner, he could conceive of philosophy only as a pitiful lady, — “e immaginava lei fatta come una donna gentile: e non la potea immaginare in atto alcuno, se non misericordioso; per che sì volentieri lo senso di vero l’ammirava, che appena lo potea volgere da quella.” And so his heart went out to her, for it seemed to him in this mood that she, more than Beatrice, was to be wooed and won. From this time he began to go where she made herself most manifest, in the schools of the *religiosi* and the disputations of the philosophers, so that in a little while, thirty months or so, — a short time, when one considers what studies he had to carry on, — he began to feel her sweetness so fully that his love for her chased away every other thought, and *quasi maravigliandosi*, he found voice, and uttered the *canzone* of which we have spoken before. By the poetical canons of the day he could not, he would not, write of his lady by name, and his tendencies were always to that allegorical method of composition of which he thought that he found models in almost all books, — in the *Æneid* and the Bible, in Boethius and in the *De Amicitia*; so it was necessary for him to speak

esclamando.” In the phrase “quasi come sognando” he refers to the *Vita Nuova*; a few lines later we have “quasi maravigliandomi apersi la bocca;” and in the *Vita Nuova*, chap. xix., “allora dico che la mia lingua parlò quasi come per sè stessa mossa.”

always of philosophy as a mortal woman whom he loved,<sup>1</sup>—*sotto figura d' altre cose*. Thus all aglow with enthusiasm, and reiterating his affirmation that the lady of his love was really the daughter of God, the queen of all, most noble and most beautiful Philosophy, Dante closes his account of the circumstances in which he wrote the *canzone*. Nothing could be more explicit and satisfactory than these statements, as well as the continuation of the exposition, where he gives the key to the different allegorical phrases which he has used in the course of the *canzone*. The heavens are really the sciences; the third heaven is rhetoric; the *movitori* are Boethius and Tully, who had led him to the love of this most gentle lady, Philosophy.<sup>2</sup> "Love" must always be understood as "study;" and the eyes of the lady are the demonstrations of philosophy, which, when comprehended by the eyes of the intellect, enamour the soul.<sup>3</sup> *Angoscia di sospiri* refers to the pain and weariness of study, and the strife with doubt; *un spirital d' amor* means a thought which is born from study; and so on through the list. Putting together these separate details, and keeping in mind the central figure, the allegorical personification of philosophy, we are now ready to read the account in the Vita Nuova of the same incident, and to see in what particulars it agrees with the account in the Convito.

Some time after the first anniversary of Beatrice's death, says Dante in the thirty-sixth chapter of the Vita Nuova, I was deep in sad thoughts, when I lifted my eyes to see if any

<sup>1</sup> See D. G. Rossetti, *Dante and his Circle* (London, 1874), p. 80, n. "He [Dante] thought Italian rhyme ought to be confined to love poems; therefore whatever he wrote (at this age) had to take the form of a love poem."

<sup>2</sup> Convito, ii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Convito, ii. 16. Also, "Oh dolcissimi ed ineffabili sembianti, e rubatori subitani della mente umana, che nelle dimostrazioni, cioè negli occhi della filosofia, apparite, quando essa alli suoi drudi ragiona! Veramente in voi è la salute, per la quale si fa beato chi vi guarda, e salvo dalla morte della ignoranza e dalli vizii."

observed me. "E vidi una gentil donna giovane e bella molto, la quale da una finestra mi riguardava molto pietosamente quant' alla vista; sicchè tutta la pietade pareva in lei accolta.<sup>1</sup> . . . Io sentii allora li miei occhi<sup>2</sup> cominciare a voler piangere; e però, temendo di non mostrare la mia viltà, mi partii dinanzi dagli occhi<sup>3</sup> di questa gentile; e dicea poi fra me medesimo: E' non può essere, che con questa pietosa donna non sia nobilissimo amore."<sup>4</sup>

Now that we know the catchwords *occhi*, etc., this all seems clear enough. There are, it is true, one or two details, the allegorical meaning of which is lost to us; but we are not surprised to find in the *Vita Nuova*, a work of art from beginning to end, the explanation of a part of which we can infer only from the *Convito*, details which are not absolutely clear to us in their allegorical and true intent. The main thing is that we understand the thread of the story, and that we see there no contradictions of what we have read in the *Convito*. So far the identity between the repeated expressions of the *Vita Nuova* as to the lady's eyes, etc., and those of the *Convito*, would convince us of the entire unity of the two accounts, even if we had not the express declaration of Dante that the *donna* of the *Convito* is the one of whom he made mention in the *Vita Nuova*.<sup>5</sup>

The story runs on rapidly. In chapter thirty-seven and the accompanying sonnet, Dante tells how he saw again and often his consoler, whose piteous face now seemed to him to have the rare paleness of his translated Beatrice. His longing for her sympathy became greater, and while he gazed on her he

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Convito*, ii. 13. "E immaginava lei fatta come una donna gentile: e non la potea immaginare in atto alcuno, se non misericordioso."

<sup>2</sup> See *Ibid.*, ii. 16. "Occhi dello 'ntelletto."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* "Gli occhi di questa donna sono le sue dimostrazioni."

<sup>4</sup> See *Ibid.*, "nell' amore, cioè nel studio di questa gentilissima donna Filosofia"

<sup>5</sup> *Convito*, ii. 2. Words could not be more explicit. "Quella gentil donna, di cui feci menzione nella fine della *Vita Nuova*."

felt the same longing to weep. The allegory is still wrapped in actual forms, which linger in our memory like those of some old fresco; and if we do not appreciate their full allegorical meaning, we can at least admire their beauty.<sup>1</sup> In the next chapter Dante's eyes began to take too much delight in his consoling lady, Philosophy; in other words, he began to be absorbed in his work. Then began the *battaglia* mentioned in the Convito, and he rebuked the vanity, the fickleness of his eyes. They had been weeping for Beatrice; now they were gazing with interest on another lady. But in spite of the rebukes which he gave himself, there came over him a great zeal for study, — "sospiri m' assaliano grandissimi ed angosciosi."<sup>2</sup> The love still grew. We find it now with the exact qualities mentioned in the Convito. She was "gentile, bella, giovane e savia, e apparita forse per volontà d'amore."<sup>3</sup> Still, at no time was forgetfulness of Beatrice total. He still tried to keep her memory fresh, and at last in the midst of his strife he came to see what it was that held him away from her. From first to last it had been the same thing, — the *occhi* of the lady, her demonstrations.<sup>4</sup> This thought is developed in the last part of chapter thirty-nine and in the sonnet, "Gentil pensiero, che parla di vui," which follows it, with the curious note and the hint that all would be plain enough "a coloro, a cui mi piace che ciò sia aperto." There, too, he

<sup>1</sup> Convito, ii., canzone. "Ponete mente almen com' io son bella."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Convito, ii. 16. "Ove si dice, 'S' egli non teme angoscia di sospiri,' qui si vuole intendere, se non teme labore di studio e lite di dubitazioni."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Convito, ii., canzone: —

"Mira quant' ella è pietosa ed umile,  
Saggia e cortese nella sua grandezza.  
.  
.  
.  
Chè . . . vederai  
Di sì alti miracoli adornezza,  
Che tu dirai: Amor, signor verace,  
Ecco l' ancella tua; fa' che ti piace."

<sup>4</sup> Vita Nuova, xxxix. Cf. Convito, ii. 16.



explains how Beatrice answered to his *anima*, his *ragione*, the noblest part of his soul: for she in heaven had passed into an idealization almost divine, and his great desire was to think of her. The *donna pietosa*, on the other hand, is represented still under the form of a mortal woman, who by her sympathy drew away Dante's thoughts from Beatrice; and hence she answered to the *appetito*, the bodily love.<sup>1</sup>

Here ends the account of the *donna gentile* (as Dante calls her, to distinguish her from Beatrice, who is *gentilissima*) in the Vita Nuova. The opening of the next chapter, the fortieth, merely says that one day, at the hour of nones, Dante had another vision of the glorious Beatrice; and with that disappeared *cotal malvagio desiderio* which had held control of him for some days.

The sonnet "Gentile pensiero," the last in that part of the Vita Nuova which is devoted to the story of the *donna pietosa*,<sup>2</sup> seems essentially parallel in point of time to the first *canzone* of the Convito; in both the strife between the two loves is still going on, but in the latter the *donna pietosa* is already victorious.<sup>3</sup> The third treatise of the Convito carries the narrative still farther. Here we see Dante's love for the new lady becoming so great as to be beyond utterance and beyond comprehension. It was not only a love for her, but for those about her, her friends and kinsmen.<sup>4</sup> What long nights were those when others slept, that he slept not, but gazed steadfastly in her eyes!<sup>5</sup> As enamoured poet, he must needs sing of his love; and what could be more fitting than the praise of his

<sup>1</sup> See an interesting discussion of the meaning of *cuore*, *mente*, *anima*, etc., in Renier, *La Vita Nuova e la Fiammetta*, pp. 108 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Vita Nuova, xxxix.

<sup>3</sup> Only in chapter xxxix., which was probably written after the whole episode, do we see a hint that prepares us for the release — "e disse *gentile* in quanto ragionava a gentil donna, chè per altro era vilissimo."

<sup>4</sup> Convito, iii. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

high lady?<sup>1</sup> The *canzone*, consequently, as well as the accompanying treatise, is full of the most magnificent praise of philosophy. It is too long and too complicated to be analyzed here; the important thing to notice in it, however, is the reference which he makes to an episode in his love. The reference is explained in the treatise. It is as follows: —

“ Canzone, e' par che tu parli contraro  
Al dir d' una sorella che tu hai;  
Chè questa donna che tant' umil fai,  
Ella la chiama fera e disdegnosa.”

This is not perplexing, now that we have the key. It is easy to see how philosophy might seem to him for a moment *fera e disdegnosa*; and in fact he explains it at some length in his treatise. *Sapienza* is the body of Philosophy;<sup>2</sup> the eyes of Sapience, or Philosophy, are her demonstrations; her smiles are her persuasions.<sup>3</sup> “Dov' è da sapere che dal principio essa filosofia pareva a me, quanto dalla parte del suo corpo (cioè sapienza), fiera, chè non mi ridea, in quanto le sue persuasioni non intendea; e disdegnosa, chè non mi volgea

<sup>1</sup> We find the same phase in his love for Beatrice, when from childlike narrative verse he passes to new and “high material.” See Vita Nuova, xviii. “E proposi di prendere per materia del mio parlare sempre mai quello che fosse loda di questa gentilissima; e pensando a ciò molto, pareami avere impresa troppo alta materia quanto a me, sicchè non ardia di cominciare; e così dimorai alquanto di con desiderio di dire e con paura di cominciare.” And forthwith he breaks into glorious praise of Beatrice. In the Convito, however, there is a reason which seems to have had some part in impelling him to write in praise of his *donna*; his first canzone — and the verse concerning the *donna gentile* in the Vita Nuova, too, no doubt — might be misunderstood. See Convito, iii. 1. “Dico che pensai che da molti di retro da me forse sarei stato ripreso di levezza d' animo, udendo me essere dal primo amore mutato. Per che, a torre via questa riprensione, nullo migliore argomento era, che dire qual era quella donna che m'avea mutato;” that is, people might hear that he was turned away from his first love, and think that it had come from mere lightness of heart: so that by telling the graces and worth of his new love he really justifies himself against all blame.

<sup>2</sup> Convito, iii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> The same idea occurs several times in the Commedia. Cf. Purg. xxvii. 54.

l'occhio, cioè ch'io non potea vedere le sue dimostrazioni."  
This was really a mistake; the fault was with Dante, not with his lady:—

“Tu sai che 'l ciel sempr' è lucente e chiaro,  
E quanto in sè non si turba giammai :  
Ma li nostr' occhi per cagioni assai  
Chiaman la stella talor tenebrosa ;  
Così quand' ella la chiama orgogliosa,  
Non considera lei secondo 'l vero,  
Ma pur secondo quel che a lei pareo.”<sup>1</sup>

In the third and last *canzone* of the Convito Dante undertakes to establish a sound opinion in regard to the proper basis of nobility. It is a question for plain discussion, and of course all allegory is out of place.<sup>2</sup> There is, then, no need of an allegorical explanation of the *canzone*,<sup>3</sup> provided that it be always kept in mind that by his *donna* Dante means, in every instance, *Philosophy*, — “per mia donna intendo sempre quella . . . virtuosissima *Filosofia*.” It is interesting, too, to see that he is almost beyond his former stage of idealizing. The allegory has grown weaker, the impulse towards art is for the moment less instinctive, and he says:—

“Le dolci rime d' amor ch' io solia  
Cercar ne' miei pensieri,  
Convien ch' io lasci; non perch' io non spero  
Ad esse ritornare,  
Ma perchè gli atti disdegnosi e feri,  
Che nella donna mia  
Sono appariti, m' han chiuso la via  
Dell' usato parlare.”

These are lame and prosaic verses for Dante.

<sup>1</sup> The “sister” that calls his lady “fera e disdegnosa” was a *ballata*, as appears from Convito, iii. 9 and 10, and may be, as Fraticelli supposes, the one beginning: “Voi che sapete ragionar d' amore.”

<sup>2</sup> Convito, iv. 1. “E perocchè in questa canzone s' intende a rimedio così necessario, non era buono sotto alcuna figura parlare.”

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* “Non sarà dunque mestiere nella sposizione di costei alcuna allegoria aprire, ma solamente la sentenza, secondo la lettera, ragionare.”

We are now ready to trace the different stages in the growth of Dante's idea, and to review the ground we have been over. In the early part of the *Convito* we saw how Dante in his grief turned to the books of Boethius and Cicero, and from them got comfort and an interest in philosophy, which seemed to him the foundation of these books. With his natural impulse towards allegories and symbols he could not conceive of philosophy otherwise than as a piteous lady. He then began in earnest the study of philosophy, and in his new enthusiasm he gradually lost his old devotion to Beatrice; and at last, passing through a period where his love for her and his love for the new lady were equal and in opposition, he came to be entirely given up to his new occupation. In the *Vita Nuova* we have virtually the same narrative, though without the detailed and clear explanation of the allegory which we find in the *Convito*. The third and fourth treatises of the *Convito* carry the narrative a little farther. Beatrice was almost forgotten, and Dante's zeal for philosophic study absorbed him. At times obstacles in his acquisition of knowledge led him to speak of his personification of Philosophy as fierce and disdainful. His love for poetry seemed to be on the point of dying away, when, to take up the narrative in the *Vita Nuova*, a vision called him back to Beatrice. In other words, metaphysics and ethics led him to theology.

## IV.

## THE DATE OF THE EPISODE OF THE DONNA PIETOSA.

THE time-references in the accounts of the *donna pietosa* in both the Convito and the Vita Nuova are few in number, and generally indefinite in character. The facts, so far as they can be made out, are as follows.

According to the Convito (ii. 2), Dante saw the *donna pietosa* two revolutions of Venus after the death of Beatrice: "Dico che la stella di Venere due fiate era rivolta in quello suo cerchio che la fa parere serotina e mattutina, secondo (i due) diversi tempi, appresso lo trapassamento di quella Beatrice beata, ecc." The question is, how long is a revolution of Venus in that circle of hers which makes her appear as evening and morning star at different times. The revolution of Venus around the sun, to which the reference would clearly apply if Dante wrote in our times, takes two hundred and twenty-five days; but Dante wrote according to the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, and knew nothing of the revolution of Venus around the sun. It has been thought, therefore, that Dante meant the period in which Venus seems to revolve around the earth, — a period of almost exactly a year, as he mentions or implies elsewhere in the Convito.<sup>1</sup> But the revolution of Venus around the earth is not that which makes her appear as morning and evening star, as may be seen from any simple explanation of the Ptolemaic system. It is the revolution of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ii. 6 and 15. See Lubin, *Intorno all' epoca della Vita Nuova* (Gratz, 1862), p. 22. Witte reckoned the period as three hundred and forty-eight days: Dante Alighieri's *lyrische Gedichte*, herausgegeben von K. L. Kannegiesser (Leipzig, 1842), ii. 63 ff. Later he changed his mind: *Dante-Forschungen*, i. 180, n.

Venus in her epicycle that makes her appear as evening and morning star at different times.<sup>1</sup> Now, the *actual* period of the revolution of Venus in her epicycle is approximately two hundred and twenty-five days.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, another way in which this revolution is sometimes regarded. Ptolemy often spoke of the revolution of a planet in its epicycle as meaning, not the period of its passage around the exact circumference of the epicycle, but the period during which, by revolving in its epicycle, it passed from one position with reference to the sun to another precisely similar position with reference to the sun.<sup>3</sup> This period, corresponding to what is now known as the synodical period, — that is, the time between a planet's two greatest periods of brilliancy, or the time between two conjunctions of a planet with the sun, — is naturally longer or shorter than the period during which the planet makes its actual revolution in its epicycle: just as the period during which the minute-hand of a watch passes from a certain position with regard to the hour-hand to another similar position with regard to the hour-hand, is greater or less than the period of an hour during which it makes its actual revolution. The period in which Venus makes a complete revolution in her epicycle (corresponding to the time in which the minute-hand makes a complete revolution around the watch-face) is two hundred and twenty-five days. The period in which Venus, while revolving in her epicycle, passes from one position with regard to the sun to a precisely similar position (corresponding to the time which it takes the minute-hand, for instance, to pass from a position in which it is exactly opposite to the hour-hand to another position in which it is exactly opposite the hour-hand) is five hundred and eighty-

<sup>1</sup> See the remarkably clear chapter on the Discoveries of Hipparchus in Narien's *Historical Account of the Origin and Progress of Astronomy* (London, 1833).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243. "The mean time of the revolution through the exact circumference of its epicycle is 224.71 days."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

four days, or about two and one half times the period during which Venus makes an actual revolution in her epicycle.<sup>1</sup> Dante, however, if we take his words strictly, means by two revolutions of Venus in that circle of hers which makes her appear alternately as evening and morning star, two revolutions of Venus in her epicycle ; that is, four hundred and fifty days. It is in vain to urge, as Lubin does,<sup>2</sup> that in four hundred and fifty days Venus does not appear both as evening and morning star, and that hence Dante meant the other revolution, the synodical or anomalistic revolution of five hundred and eighty-four days, in which Venus passes from morning star to evening star, and then back again to morning star. Dante refers, even according to Lubin, to the revolution of Venus in her epicycle ; that is, to a period of two hundred and twenty-five days. It happens that about two and a half of these revolutions bring about a certain relation of Venus to the sun ; but the larger period has nothing to do with the simple revolution of Venus in her epicycle.<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately we have another time reference which would help us to decide which revolution of Venus Dante meant, even if the evidence were equal on either side.<sup>4</sup> According to the *Convito*, Dante did not feel the full sweetness of his love for the Lady Philosophy until thirty months after his first glimpse of her :<sup>5</sup> “ Sicchè in piccol tempo, forse di trenta

<sup>1</sup> In the ninth and tenth books of the *Almagest*, with which Dante was, no doubt, familiar, Ptolemy speaks of this longer period. He never confuses it, so far as I can see, with the real revolution of Venus in her epicycle. See, for example, Delambre, *Histoire de l'astronomie ancienne* (Paris, 1817), vol. ii. (virtually a translation of the *Almagest*), pp. 313, 314, where Ptolemy discriminates between “le mouvement diurne d'anomalie” and “le mouvement propre de Vénus” (in her epicycle).

<sup>2</sup> Dante spiegato con Dante, pp. 70 ff.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that this period of two hundred and twenty-five days coincides, naturally enough, with our period for the revolution of Venus around the sun does not concern the point in question.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>5</sup> Todeschini, queerly enough, reckons the thirty months, not from the first appearance of the lady, but from the death of Beatrice : see *Scritti su Dante*,

mesi, cominciai tanto a sentire della sua dolcezza, che 'l suo amore cacciava e distruggeva ogni altro pensiero ; per che io, sentendomi levare dal pensiero del primo amore alla virtù di questo, quasi maravigliandomi, apersi la bocca nel parlare della proposta canzone (*Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete*)."<sup>1</sup> The first *canzone* of the *Convito*, then, was written two revolutions of Venus plus thirty months after the death of Beatrice. Two revolutions of Venus I should take as twice two hundred and twenty-five days, or fifteen months. Beatrice died June 9, 1290. Then Dante saw the *donna pietosa* first in September, 1291, and he wrote the *canzone* in March, 1294. If, on the other hand, two revolutions of Venus be taken, as Lubin would have it, as twice five hundred and eighty-four days, or thirty-nine months, then Dante saw the Lady Philosophy in September, 1293, and he wrote the *canzone* in March, 1296. But, as we have seen, the *canzone* could not have been written later than the early part of 1295. It was probably written even earlier than that.<sup>2</sup> We are justified, then, by this limitation of time in regarding the revolution of two hundred and twenty-five days as that referred to by Dante, and in fixing September, 1291, as the time at which he first saw the *donna pietosa*, and March, 1294, as the time when he wrote his first *canzone* in her praise.<sup>3</sup>

i. 320. Such a supposition goes against Dante's plain statement. Lubin is right in adding the thirty months to the date at which Dante first sees the *donna pietosa*: *Intorno all' epoca della Vita Nuova*, p. 22. Cf. also D'Ancona, *La Vita Nuova*, 2d ed. (Pisa, 1884), p. xiii, n. 3.

<sup>1</sup> *Convito*, ii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> See *supra*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> In March, 1294, Charles Martel was in Florence. See *supra*, p. 11, n. 1. The date agrees admirably with the relation of the *canzone* to Martel. Lubin tries to avoid the dilemma by supposing *trenta* to be a mistake for *tredici*, but that is a sheer and unwarranted assumption. See Dante spiegato con Dante, p. 76. "Piccol tempo, forse di trenta mesi" is a curious statement, but I do not see that we have any right not to accept it as it stands, unless it can be proved that there is another reading. No such reading has yet been found. The text of the *Convito*, however, has never been properly settled. Angeletti (*Cronologia*, p. 15) escapes the dilemma in a curious way. He says: "Carlo



We are now nearly at the end of the time-references in the Convito. We have no means of determining the dates of the two remaining *canzoni*; but from the rapidity with which Dante's love seemed to run its course, it is not improbable that a year, or even less, would be sufficient to cover the whole period. After thirty months of doubting and striving, Dante gave himself wholly over to worldly philosophy in March, 1294. Then came a short period in which he wrote in praise of his new love the *canzone* in the third book of the Convito, and, a little later, the *canzone* in the fourth book of the Convito, — a composition which shows lack of poetic power, and absorption in his studies. Finally, he went back, in 1294-95, or perhaps later, to what was both an old and a new love, — to Beatrice, as the symbol of religious philosophy. That the revival of Dante's love for Beatrice was not later than 1294-95 is perhaps confirmed by a curious reference in the Convito to an eye-sickness which troubled him in the year in which he wrote the second *canzone*.<sup>1</sup> Dante seems to mention the same misfortune in an allegorical form in the fortieth chapter of the Vita Nuova. Here, however, he refers it to a fit of repentant weeping after he had returned to the love of Beatrice. It would follow, then, that his love for the *donna pietosa* was at an end in 1294-95, if we suppose that the interval of time between the first *canzone* and the second is not large.

The Convito breaks off abruptly, leaving Dante still in the service of Worldly Philosophy.<sup>2</sup> The Vita Nuova covers a

Martello è uno spirito beato, e come tale può leggere in Dio i segreti pensieri e il futuro dell' amico Dante ; tanto meglio dunque ne conoscerà il passato. Per la qual cosa non v'è bisogno davvero ch' egli abbia letto in terra la canzone, o che abbia inteso semplicemente parlarne, per poterla ricordare in cielo."

<sup>1</sup> Convito, iii. 9. See Witte, Dante-Forschungen, i. 148.

<sup>2</sup> It seems possible that the Vita Nuova, the Convito, and the Commedia were more closely connected in plan than we are accustomed to think. The Vita Nuova tells in detail Dante's love for Beatrice, and mentions briefly his estrangement from that love and his return to it. The Convito mentions the first of

large period of time, for it includes the narrative of the revival of Dante's love for Beatrice. As we might expect from the nature of the book, the time-references are vague and infrequent. Fortunately they do not in the least conflict with those in the *Convito*. In chapter xxxv. there is a reference to June 9, 1291. In chapter xxxvi. Dante says that "some time afterwards" he saw the *donna pietosa*. We know from the *Convito* that he saw her first in September, 1291, so that "some time" stands for three months. Then follows a detailed account of his struggles against his new love. That may be supposed to cover the period of thirty months, which he assigns to the same struggle in the *Convito*. In the last part of the thirty-ninth chapter, his desire is for the first time turned wholly to the new lady. In the fortieth chapter, as if it were immediately after, his "heart began bitterly to repent of the desire by which it had so vilely allowed itself for some days to be possessed." I take the "some days, *alquanti dì*," to refer not to the long period in which Dante struggled with his doubts, but to the comparatively short period during which he was entirely possessed by Worldly Philosophy, in direct opposition to Divine Philosophy. Much has been made of the phrase "*alquanti dì*" and of the alleged contradiction between it and the supposed duration of his subjection to his false love in the *Convito*. As I have tried to show, the period in which Dante, neglecting the thought of Beatrice, was entirely under the control of Worldly Philosophy, need not have been long, — a few months at best, perhaps; and I do not see that Dante contradicts himself

these three states, relates with great detail the second, and ends abruptly. May it not be that, had it been completed, it would have gone on to describe his return to the love of Beatrice? Is it impossible that the marvellous vision in which Dante conceived a more glorious way of praising Beatrice was the first idea of the *Convito*, and that he laid this work aside only when he conceived the *Commedia*? In the *Commedia* — the third part of the "trilogy" — he barely alludes to his early love for Beatrice, writes briefly of his estrangement, and gives all his power to telling of the glory of his new love for her.

seriously when he refers to it by "alquanti dì," especially when I consider the great care which he took to shape everything in the Vita Nuova to his ideal and artificial conception of proportion. That such a theory would not give sufficient time for the development of Dante's new love is not a stable objection. The thirty months of study — the long incubation of the new idea — rendered its growth speedy when it once saw the light; and the progress of Dante's love from his earthly affection for Beatrice, through his devotion to philosophy, to his final spiritual love for the idealized, symbolic Beatrice, need not include more than "thirty months" plus "some days."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Vita Nuova closes almost immediately after the narrative of Dante's return to Beatrice. As we have seen above (p. 9), there is nothing that shows a long interval between his repentance and the *mirabil visione*. The date of composition of the last part of the book would then be 1294-95. If we choose to take literally Dante's statement, partially confirmed by a statement made by Boccaccio, that he wrote the Vita Nuova at the beginning of his youth, we must suppose that part of it (chapters one to thirty-four inclusive) was written in 1290-91. The latter part could not have been written earlier than 1294-95, as we have seen, and it need not have been written much later. This separation of the two parts might perhaps be borne out by a very minute study of the style of the whole; as soon as we have a concordance of the Vita Nuova I hope that this will be done. On the other hand, if the phrase "at the entrance of youth" be taken loosely, it might be extended to cover 1294-95. I am rather inclined to the former view, that the first part was written in 1290-91, and the latter in 1294-95 or 1294-96. See Casini, Vita Nuova, xx. and note 2.

TABLE SHOWING THE PARALLEL TIME-REFERENCES IN THE VITA NUOVA AND THE CONVITO.

VITA NUOVA. <sup>1</sup>	CONVITO. <sup>2</sup>	CONVITO. <sup>2</sup>
XXX. Death of Beatrice. June 9, 1290.	ii. 13 ; p. 149. Death of Beatrice. [June 9, 1290.]	ii. 2 ; p. 111. <i>Trappassamento di Beatrice</i> . [June 9, 1290.]
XXXV. First anniversary of her death. June 9, 1291.	After <i>some time</i> his mind began to console itself with books : they were not easy to understand at first. At last (p. 150) he did understand them, and conceived of Philosophy as a piteous lady. [September, 1291.]	p. 111. Two revolutions of Venus after the death of Beatrice he saw the piteous lady whom he mentions in the Vita Nuova. September, 1291.
XXXVI. <i>Poi per alquanto tempo</i> he saw a piteous lady. [September, 1291.]	p. 150. He then began to study philosophy in the schools, and after <i>thirty months</i> became wholly absorbed in it, and wrote a <i>canzone</i> (p. 104) about the struggle which he had gone through. March, 1294.	p. 112. Battle between the thought of Beatrice and the thought of the new lady. Finally he writes a <i>canzone</i> at the time of the victory of the new thought. [March, 1294.]
XXXVI.-XXXIX. He went through a long struggle, but finally his desire was turned wholly towards this lady. [March, 1294.]	From the first, philosophy seems hard (ii. 13, iv. 1 ; pp. 149, 239). He writes a <i>canzone</i> in praise of philosophy ( <i>trattato</i> iii.; pp. 168 ff.), and one on the proper basis of nobility ( <i>trattato</i> iv.; pp. 240 ff.), and other <i>canzoni</i> . Finally, not long afterwards (by implication), his study of philosophy led him to the study of theology. 1294-95.	
XL. He was possessed by this love for "some days." Then he sees a vision of his glorious Beatrice, and abandons his wicked love for the <i>donna gentile</i> . [1294-95.]		

<sup>1</sup> References by chapters.<sup>2</sup> References by chapters and by pages in Fraticelli's edition (Firenze, 1879).

## V.

## OTHER THEORIES ABOUT THE DONNA PIETOSA.

CLEAR and unambiguous as seem the results which we have reached, they are flatly contradicted by the theory with regard to the *donna pietosa* of which Scartazzini is in great part the originator.<sup>1</sup> The best statement of this theory is found in his *Abhandlungen über Dante Alighieri* (Frankfurt a. M., 1880), pp. 131-142. After a brief abstract of the story as Dante gives it, he says: "War diese schöne Mitleidige ein Mädchen von Fleisch und Bein, oder ist sie ein blosses Symbol? Unzweifelhaft Ersteres."

The first proof is that the traits of the *donna pietosa* are human. "Menschlich, sehr menschlich sind ihre Züge. Sie erscheint ihm das erstemal an einem Fenster, sieht ihn mitleidig an, er entfernt sich mit einer gewissen Scheu; ihre Miene ist nicht allein die des Mitleids, sondern zugleich der Liebe. Hinwiederum sagt sich aber der Dichter, nicht Liebe zu ihm, sondern nur der Schmerz über Beatrice's Verlust sei es, was sie erfüllt, zum Mitleid rührt, ihre Wangen entfärbt. Das passt schlecht auf eine Allegorie."

Now, some of this is true enough, although the authority for the last statement is not to be found in the *Vita Nuova*, or elsewhere. The lady does appear at a window; Dante does withdraw from before her, though not on account of

<sup>1</sup> I mention it, not because Scartazzini upholds it or upheld it, but because in one form or another it is exceedingly common. Cf. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Dante and his Circle* (Amer. ed., 1887), p. 72, n. "Such a passing admission [that Gemma Donati was the *donna pietosa*] would of course imply an admission of what I believe to be at the bottom of all true Dantesque commentary, — that is, the existence always of the actual events even where the allegorical superstructure has been raised by Dante himself."

shyness ; she does look at him with pity, and afterwards whenever she saw him, " she became of a compassionate aspect and of a pallid color, as of that of love," whereat he was reminded of his noble lady Beatrice. Scartazzini's point is, then, that these facts prove that the new lady had an actual existence. But we may answer, why should not the new lady, even if a mere allegorical personage, have the aspect of a mortal woman ? Why should she not have life ? Is not that just what Dante meant to give her ? All through Dante's works, all through the works of his contemporaries and his immediate predecessors, one finds allegories expressed in human form, and there is no room for wonder that the *donna pietosa* has the appearance of reality. Once granted that a true poet, a great poet, has decided to personify an idea or an experience, the last thing of all to surprise us should be that his personification has a lifelike reality.

Furthermore, Dante himself tells us how he came to conceive of philosophy as a compassionate woman ; and the account has all the semblance of truth. Following that account step by step, we can see indistinctly the various stages by which the poetic thought grew in his mind. But even were it not for this simple solution of the allegory, we should perhaps suspect from the Vita Nuova itself that the *donna gentile* was not a real person. From the very first there is a suggestion of unreality about her. The mysterious relation of her eyes to those of Dante, the anguish of sighs that takes hold on him on her account, are appropriate to allegory. The new lady, too, has something phantom-like about her,—a thinner quality of life than that of Beatrice. She has no friends, no family ; with a single exception, she is not seen at any fixed place,—in the street, at her home, at feast or place of mourning, as was Beatrice ; she does not speak or smile, she has none of the qualities of activity : only her face is pallid and pitiful, and in her eyes he finds a strange compassion.

But Scartazzini says there are absolute contradictions

between the accounts of the Convito and that of the Vita Nuova: discrepancies so striking and so fundamental that they prove at once the reality of the *donna pietosa*. These alleged contradictions are as follows.<sup>1</sup> First, the new lady appears in the Vita Nuova to be a real person, and in the Convito she is said to be the mere personification of an idea. As I have already said, it is a matter of course that when a poet represents an idea in the form of a person, he should endeavor to give that person the semblance of reality. But Scartazzini asserts that she is lifelike in a way in which no personification could be. The chief, indeed the only important instance which he brings forward is that the lady appeared at a window. Scartazzini urges this as a telling proof of her reality. For myself, I confess, I see nothing strange whatever about it. One could find some difficulty like this in almost every allegory of Dante's if one were to press it too far. It is noticeable, too, that there is no mention of the window in the verse of the Vita Nuova; there we find only general imagery. It is in the prose account, written probably at a later time, that the "window" appears,—as if a sign that Dante was trying to heighten the impression of reality which he had already made in the series of sonnets about the *donna pietosa*. But even if the window were an essential part of the narrative, I see no difficulty in explaining it in an allegorical sense. Why cannot "da una finestra" be interpreted as "da un alto," as Bartoli suggests; or why may we not compare the phrase with the "alla finestra degli occhi," which Dante uses in the Convito?<sup>2</sup> These con-

<sup>1</sup> We can afford to omit the pages of ridicule which Scartazzini devotes to the theory that the lady of compassion was Gemma Donati. He has recently adopted the same theory himself. Cf. Balbo, *Life of Dante*, p. 99; Fraticelli, *Vita di Dante*, p. 109; Todeschini, *Scritti su Dante*, i. 332; Scartazzini, *Jahrbuch*, iii. 31; iv. 193 ff.; *Abhandlungen*, i. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Both conjectures are good, it seems to me. Dante might easily conceive of Philosophy as looking down on him from a height. On the other hand, it is by no means improbable that the window was suggested to him by some phase of

jectures may seem uncertain, but it is merely because we are pushing analysis into a region where certainty is not to be attained.

What, too, does it mean, continues Scartazzini, when Dante is ashamed to weep before the *donna pietosa*? What means it that she grows pale whenever she sees him? Both these questions are as hard to answer as they are unnecessary and misleading. Because Dante in the *Convito* laid stress on various actions on the part of the Lady Philosophy, or on various qualities of hers, in order by them to express certain qualities of philosophy and their effect on him, does it follow that in the *Vita Nuova*, a work of an entirely different nature, we are obliged to look for a hidden meaning in every word which is said about the *donna pietosa*? Dante, interested in the creation of this unreal figure that was so real in his imagination, may have introduced into the narrative touches like these without giving them a hidden meaning, or the clew to a hidden meaning that really exists may be obscure. Dante thought of his new lady as pale, and rightly. Sensual love may be hot-cheeked and ruddy; the love of the gentle heart is pale and delicate. The new lady had many of the traits of Beatrice, and she had, too, her quality of feature: that may have been in general Dante's meaning. That he felt moved to tears, and yet could not weep before her, may also have a general signification that will not be inconsistent with the rest of the conception. It was natural that the wondrous consolation of Boethius and Cicero should bring tears to his eyes; and it is no less natural that some vague feeling of shame in abandoning himself to this resur-

the allegory of the "eyes" which he wished to present. To call the eyes the "windows of the body" is not at all an uncommon metaphor. See, for instance, Girolamo Ruscelli's *Lettura sopra un sonetto dell' illustriss. signor marchese della Terza alla divina signora marchesa del Vasto* (Venice, 1542), p. 4: "Et di qui con molta ragione gridava il Profeta, che la morte è entrata per le fenestre, cioè per gli occhi, che sono fenestra del corpo et ancor della mente nostra." See also Mr. Lowell's *Dante* (*Among my Books*, vol. ii. p. 73).



rection of his grief may have worked upon him, and led him to withdraw momentarily from the study of philosophy.

In brief, then, we have no reason to assume that each point in the narrative of the Vita Nuova must have an exact counterpart in the corresponding allegorical narrative, inasmuch as Dante might have introduced in the Vita Nuova slight incidents which were true to the spirit of the allegory, but had no more exact allegorical meaning than many a similar incident in the greater allegory of the Divina Commedia. Or, on the other hand, even if it be granted that there should be some allegorical meaning in every particle of the story, we are in no way bound to trouble ourselves by hunting for it in a case where we have no possible clew to the meaning except the general trend of the allegory, unless, of course, the instance in question seems plainly to contradict the spirit of the whole allegorical narrative. The instances quoted by Scartazzini, however, are in no way inconsistent with what Dante says in the Convito, nor have they any weakening effect in consequence on the testimony of the Vita Nuova. If Dante can write in the Convito, in plainly allegorical terms, of the father of Philosophy, of her friends, her eyes, her smile, her body, we should not be surprised to find among the mystic incidents of the Vita Nuova a point here and there, the real significance of which only the author could explain.

In the second place, according to Scartazzini, there is a contradiction between the traits of the lady in the Vita Nuova and the traits with which she appears in the Convito: in the former she is tender and compassionate; in the latter she is *fera* and *disdegnosa*. Now, this is a point which, as we have seen, Dante himself touches on in the Convito, and he takes pains to tell us, with great detail, how temporary ill success in his philosophical studies caused him to berate his mistress in a *ballata*, and call her hard-hearted and disdainful. These qualities were not really characteristics of his lady. Just as clouds obscure the sun, and we say it stops shining, so his

own impatience and dulness led him for an instant to call his mistress, the Lady Philosophy, proud and scornful. But it was only for a moment that he thought her so, and the incident was so unessential to the main narrative that it appears only in the *Convito*, as if by accident, and in the *Vita Nuova*, as we might expect, not at all. In a book in which Dante's main purpose is to show his devotion to Beatrice, and in which the episode of the *donna pietosa* enters only in brief, in order to heighten the effect of the total self-surrender of chapters forty and forty-three, what reason could we have for expecting to find references to this mere episode in an episode,—the scornfulness of the Lady Philosophy?

Thirdly, says Scartazzini, the chronology is wrong. How can a love for philosophy, which began in September, 1291, and was in full force fifteen years later, when Dante wrote the commentary to the poems in the *Convito*,—how can a love of fifteen years be spoken of in the *Vita Nuova* as a love of "some days"? But, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> the *alquanti d'i* is not an inappropriate phrase for the period of time during which Dante let his heart be wholly possessed by the Lady Philosophy. And the love for philosophy shown in the prose portions of the *Convito* is an entirely different feeling from his "wicked desire," in 1294-95, for worldly and irreligious philosophy.

Scartazzini's first charge, then, that all the incidents of the *Vita Nuova* cannot be explained allegorically, is without important bearing on the question; his second charge, that there are contradictions between the characteristics given to the lady in the *Vita Nuova* and those given to her in the *Convito*, is without basis; and his third charge, that there are contradictions in the chronology, is equally groundless. We fall back, then, upon the direct and repeated assertions of Dante that the lady of the *Convito* was the lady mentioned in the *Vita Nuova*, and that she was Philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *supra*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> See *Convito*, ii. 13, 16 *et passim*.

An important characteristic of Scartazzini's theory as to the reality of the *donna pietosa* is that he believes Dante's love for her to have been an innocent one;<sup>1</sup> the opinion of Carducci, D'Ancona, and others is that Dante, like most men of his time, had numerous love adventures, and that this was one of them.<sup>2</sup> These writers try to establish an antecedent probability for their view with regard to the *donna pietosa* by showing that Dante led a sensual life at certain times. They refer to the plain assertion of Boccaccio, the sonnet addressed to Dante by Cavalcanti, the reproof of Beatrice in the *Commedia*, the mystic punishment of fire in the Purgatory, and the regrets which Dante expressed as to his life with Forese Donati.<sup>3</sup> There is also a set of love-poems attributed to Dante, which, if they be his, and if they be not allegorical, show qualities very different from the purity and grace of his poems to Beatrice.<sup>4</sup> With this antecedent probability my essay has nothing whatever to do.<sup>5</sup> As to the poems, some are not authentic, some are certainly allegorical, none have any connection with the *donna pietosa*. Even the sonnet "Parole mie che per lo mondo siete," of which Carducci makes so much, testifies rather against than for his opinion.<sup>6</sup> Instead of being a farewell to a real love, it is a

<sup>1</sup> Scartazzini formerly held the opposite opinion; but this was what he thought in 1883, or at least early in that year. See Appendix I.

<sup>2</sup> See D'Ancona, preface to the first edition of his *Vita Nuova*, and Carducci, *Le rime di Dante Alighieri*, in his *Studi letterari*.

<sup>3</sup> Confirmed, according to Carducci, by certain sonnets addressed to Forese, and attributed to Dante. See *op. cit.*, pp. 160-62, note.

<sup>4</sup> These are *Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro; Io son venuto al punto della rota; E' non è legno di sì forti nocchi; Io son sì vago della bella luce; Io maledico il dì ch' io vidi prima; Nulla mi parrà mai più crudel cosa; Amor, tu vedi ben che questa donna; Al poco giorno ed al gran cerchio d'ombra.*"

<sup>5</sup> See Mr. Lowell's essay on Dante in *Among my Books*, vol. ii. p. 62, and note.

<sup>6</sup> Gaspary (*Geschichte der ital. Lit.*, vol. i. note to p. 254) has an interesting note on the words "quella donna in cui errai," which occur in this sonnet. He says that *errare* means here "in Noth, Angst sein," just as in the Sicilian poets, and in the *Vita Nuova*, xiii: "Così mi trovo in amorosa erranza."

leave-taking of philosophy; for the reference to the *canzone*, "Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete," makes plain the connection between the sonnet in question and the love of the Convito, inasmuch as the *canzone*, even according to Carducci, must refer to the allegorical *donna* of the Convito, and not to her (supposed) real prototype in the Vita Nuova.

The main point of the theory of Carducci and D'Ancona is the supposition that Dante's motive in writing the Convito was one of wilful deception, to cover from the eyes of the world an illicit love. This is entirely inconsistent with what we know of Dante's character; and it is absurd to suppose that at the age of forty he devised an elaborate lie to avoid the reputation of a transient love-adventure which had taken place years before in Florence. According to Boccaccio, Dante in his later years was ashamed of the Vita Nuova.<sup>1</sup> If this be true, it was perhaps because he regretted that the greater part of it was direct narrative, and without that deep allegorical meaning which what he wrote later of Beatrice had. This may throw some light on what follows. In the prose of the Convito (iii. 1) Dante says that he wrote the *canzone*, "Amor, che nella mente mi ragiona," for fear of a certain *infamia*. "La terza ragione fu un argomento di provvidenza. Dico che pensai che da molti di retro da me forse sarei stato ripreso di levezza d'animo, udendo me essere dal primo amore mutato. Per che, a torre via questa riprensione, nullo migliore argomento era, che dire qual era quella donna che m'avea mutato." Just as Dante wrote a *canzone* to rid himself of a possible charge of being light of love, so one of the reasons why he wrote the Convito was to avoid an *infamia*. It was, however, a very subordinate motive, as we can see from the introduction to the Convito.<sup>2</sup> His

<sup>1</sup> Vita di Dante, per cura di B. Gamba (Venice, 1825), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Selmi (Il Convito, p. 73) estimates Dante's motives in a very satisfactory way. "Noi reputiamo, che il primo e vero impulso all'ideamento del Convito, pigliasse origine in lui dalla pura e santa intenzione di eccitare al bene, che l'inclinazione nativa a poetare in forma magistrale aggiunse esca al fuoco, e che terzo

plan was to spread a feast of reason for all open-minded men : "la vivanda di questo convito sarà di quattordici maniere ordinata, cioè quattordici canzoni sì di amore, come di virtù materiate, le quali senza lo presente pane [la presente sposizione] aveano d' alcuna scurità ombra, sicchè a molti lor bellezza più che lor bontà era in grado." The method he chose was accordingly the explanation of some of his allegorical *canzoni* which had been misunderstood. But he suddenly recalled to himself, as if by accident, that there was a rule of the rhetoricians that a man shall not write of himself unless for sufficient reason : in order to avoid evil misunderstandings, or in order to show by the example of one's own self, *per via di dottrina*, some necessary and useful philosophical principle.<sup>1</sup> By virtue of both these exceptions Dante thought it justifiable to write about himself. "Movemi timore d' infamia, e movemi desiderio di dottrina dare, la quale altri veramente dare non può. Temo la infamia di tanta passione avere seguita, quanta concepe chi legge le soprannominate canzoni, in me avere signoreggiato ; la quale infamia si cessa, per lo presente di me parlare, interamente ; lo quale mostra che non passione ma virtù sie stata la movente cagione. Intendo anche mostrare la vera sentenza di quelle che per alcuno vedere non si può, s' io non la conto, perch' è nascosa sotto figura d' allegoria."<sup>2</sup> It is probable that we are to connect this *infamia* with the *ripreensione* which he dreaded in 1295, — the shame of having left his first love, his mystic *amor in rima*, and of having celebrated in verse an (apparently) more earthly lady.

At all events, whatever we think the reason of this *infamia*, there is nothing concerning it which hints that the Convito was a defence against the ill-repute of a notorious scandal.

si aggiungesse la volontà di purgarsi dall' accusa di leggiero nelle cose d' amore." This is in substance the impression that one gets from Dante's own words.

<sup>1</sup> Convito, i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Convito, i. 2, at end.

Were the whole question of the *donna pietosa* indeterminate, one might perhaps wrest from the passages which I have quoted some such meaning as that which Carducci attributes to them; but in presence of precise declarations on the one hand, deductions from minor ambiguities are not of much weight on the other. Either Dante was a hypocrite, or else he spoke the truth when he said in his comment on the second *canzone*, "Wherefore, since this nature is called *mind*, I said that love discoursed in my mind to make it understood that this love was that which is born in the noblest of natures, that is, [the love] of truth and virtue, and to *shut out every false opinion by which it might be suspected that my love was for the delight of sense.*"<sup>1</sup>

#### CONCLUSION.

The line of argument which I have tried to carry out has been as follows: First, I discussed the principal points concerning the dates at which the *Convito* and the *Vita Nuova* were composed. I decided that the former was written after Dante went into exile, and that the latter was written not long after the episode of the "piteous lady." I then examined the characteristics of the two books, in order

<sup>1</sup> *Convito*, iii. 3. Quoted by Mr. Lowell, *Among my Books*, ii. 61. Mr. Lowell's opinion as to the reality of the *donna gentile* is not quite clear. On p. 65 he says: "Dante would try to reconcile, so far as he conscientiously could, his present with his past. This he could do by means of the allegorical interpretation." Again, on p. 64: "Now Dante himself, we think, gives us the clew, by following which we may reconcile the contradiction, what Miss Rossetti calls 'the astounding discrepancy,' between the lady of the *Vita Nuova* who made him unfaithful to Beatrice, and the same lady in the *Convito*, who in attributes is identical with Beatrice herself." Again, p. 69: "That there should seem to be a discrepancy between the lady of the *Vita Nuova* and her of the *Convito*, Dante himself was already aware when writing the former and commenting it." But on p. 73 he says: "Whether at the time when the poems of the *Vita Nuova* were written the lady who withdrew him for a while from Beatrice was (*which we doubt*) a person of flesh and blood or not, she was no longer so when the prose narrative was composed."

to decide what value should be given to the testimony of each as to the experiences of Dante's life from the death of Beatrice to the year of his repentance for the love he bore the *donna gentile*. The result is that I regard the *Convito* as a straightforward expository work, conducted with admirable method, and worthy — other things being equal — of complete trust, so far as its testimony as to Dante's life goes. The *Vita Nuova*, on the other hand, I concluded to be an imaginative work written on artistic principles and while Dante was not far removed from the mood in which he wrote the poems which concern his new lady. Hence, though valuable as showing the way in which Dante felt at a given time, it is to be used with caution so far as dates and exact facts are concerned. The ensuing examination and comparison of the narrative parts of the two books confirmed these views, and led me to believe that the *donna pietosa* was a symbol for Dante's love for and study of philosophy, which began in September, 1291, and came to a sudden close in 1294-95. The chronology of this episode, so far as it could be gathered from the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convito*, seemed to be reasonable and without inherent contradictions. I then examined the essential points in the theories of Scartazzini and Carducci with regard to the questions which I have been discussing, and showed why I thought that these theories are false.

There are other questions which bear more or less remotely upon the subject which I treat ; but they are outside the exact limits of my theme, — the interpretation and reconciliation of the accounts of the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convito* concerning the experiences of Dante after the death of Beatrice.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Readers who are interested to read what German subtlety has done on the subject are referred to a very compact article by Prof. A. Gaspary, of Breslau, in the *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie*, vol. vii. pp. 611 ff. A characteristic Italian treatment of the subject is D'Ovidio's review of D'Ancona's *Vita Nuova* in the *Nuova Antologia* for March 15, 1884, pp. 238 ff.

APPENDIX.<sup>1</sup>

## I.

THE rapidity with which Scartazzini has changed his opinions with regard to the *donna pietosa* makes an analysis of his views difficult. I will, however, give a short list of the important articles written by him and by Witte on this subject; it may be of some use in tracing the steps by which Scartazzini has brought himself to the opinion which he now holds.

*Witte.* — Ueber das Missverständniss Dantes (1824), in Dante-Forschungen, i. 59 ff.; Dante's Lyrische Gedichte (2d ed., 1842); Review of Wegele's Dante (1853), in Dante-Forschungen, i. 92-93. — All are strong for the unity of the narratives in the Vita Nuova and the Convito. He asserts that Dante lived at times a sensual life.

Introduction to his translation of the Commedia (1865); Dantes Trilogie. Dante-Forschungen, i. 141-182. — Views modified. A real woman is referred to in the *donna pietosa*. This is the cause of Beatrice's reproof in the thirtieth canto of the Purgatorio.

*Scartazzini.* — Dante Alighieri (1869). — Emphasis on the sensual life of Dante, but sharp distinction of his intellectual sin in yielding to worldly philosophy.

Zu Dante's innerer Entwicklungsgeschichte, in the Dante Jahrbuch, iii. (1871). — Affirms the reality of the *donna pietosa* and Dante's sensual love for her. He had afterward other loves; and the

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 49 ff.



*donna pietosa* of the Convito is a collective symbol of these wanderings from Beatrice, and at the same time the symbol of his intellectual wandering from spiritual faith.

Purgatorio (1875). — Notes on the meeting with Forese Donati. Here Scartazzini asserts that Dante led a wild life at one time, with Forese as his boon companion. The Forese sonnets are authentic (as I understand it). The reproof in the thirtieth canto of the Purgatorio, however, referred entirely to Dante's spiritual wanderings.

Witte. — La Vita Nuova (1876). — He has gradually become convinced by the life-like traits of the *donna pietosa*, and believes in her reality.

Scartazzini. — Zu Dante's Seelengeschichte, Jahrbuch (1877), iv. 143-238; Dante's geistige Entwicklung, in his Abhandlungen (1880), pp. 98-243; Dante (Manuale Hoepli), translated by Mr. Davidson (original in 1883; translation in 1887). — In all these he affirms with increasing strength, (1) that the *donna pietosa* was real; (2) that Dante's love for her and all other women was pure; (3) that the reproof of the thirtieth canto of the Purgatorio referred to his intellectual sin alone; (4) that his sin with Forese was that of scepticism, etc.

Witte meanwhile turned in some respects towards the views which Scartazzini held in 1872-77, as may be seen in one of his latest essays in his Dante-Forschungen; but it is not worth while to state the details of the change here. Scartazzini's latest change of mind — at least the latest of which I have seen notice — is mentioned in Bartoli, Storia d. lett. ital., v. 54, note. Scartazzini, it seems, writes in the Convivio (a Sicilian journal), March 30 and April 16, 1883, to the effect that Beatrice was not the wife of Simon de' Bardi: "Abbiamo ben altri indizi che la Beatrice di Dante visse e morì nubile, che morì *amata e amante del Poeta*." The argument is so weak that it is not worth while to give it here. The *donna gentile* of the Vita Nuova, too, is Gemma! That caps the climax, — at least for one who has read the pages of ridicule which Scartazzini used to pour forth on all the unfortunates who had ventured the opinion that Gemma might have been the *donna pietosa*.

## II.

I ADD here, for the sake of convenience, parts of an important letter from Professor Simon Newcomb to Mr. Norton, with regard to the revolution of Venus in her epicycle (cf. *supra*, pp. 41-4).

"The motion of Venus around its epicycle led to its being seen alternately to the east and to the west of the Sun, or as evening and morning star. I think, therefore, there can be no doubt that by *quello suo cerchio* Dante meant the epicycle.

"But when we attempt to judge by a revolution in this circle, we are met by difficulties. The actual revolution in the epicycle, relatively to a fixed direction, is made in 225 days; the epicycle in fact corresponding to the orbit of Venus around the Sun. But in considering the changing phenomena presented by Venus, it would be quite in accord with popular custom to measure the revolution relatively to the line passing through the earth to the centre of the epicycle, because that is the revolution which brings about the changing phases of the planet. Owing to the continuous motion of the centre of the epicycle around the earth, it takes 584 days for this revolution. In this time the planet makes more than two and a half actual revolutions in the epicycle considered as a geometrical figure. Yet there would be no great logical error in calling this a revolution. To make the nomenclature exact, we should only have to think of the epicycle as a material circle revolving on an arm EC to which it is fixed at B. [E is the earth, and C the centre of the epicycle.] Then this material cycle would make a complete circle in one year with the arm to which it was fastened; the revolution of the planet in this material cycle would actually require 584 days.

"My conclusion is about this: if Dante was endeavoring to give an exact description of the astronomical phenomena, then his expression, *secondo i due diversi tempi*, might mean a revolution making due allowance for the two periods of revolution around the deferent and the revolution in the epicycle, thus leading to the absolute time of one geometrical revolution, or 225 days. But if his main thought was the measurement of the period of time by the changing phenomena of the planet, it would be more likely that he gave to the period the actual and popular conception of the revolution relative to the line joining the earth and the centre of

the epicycle. The expression just quoted lends itself equally well to this view, since, in consequence of the two different times (of revolution), the apparent circuit around the epicycle is not complete until the end of 584 days. Thus while there can be little doubt that the two different times referred to the two periods of one year, and either 225 days or 584 days, it is impossible to decide between the two meanings I have indicated.

" . . . It was not the revolution of Venus around the earth, but around her epicycle, that made her appear at intervals as morning and as evening star. The period of Venus from greatest brilliancy to greatest brilliancy was not an exact revolution in any circle, unless we assign to that circle a revolution of its own in the way I have above described."

It will be seen from the above how complicated the question really is, and how unfitted any one is to render absolute decision upon it who is not well acquainted with the details of the astronomical phraseology in vogue at Dante's time. That the phrase *secondo i due diversi tempi* — or *secondo diversi tempi*, as another manuscript reads — may have a technical astronomical meaning, instead of the simple one of "at different seasons," makes the problem still more intricate. Even if, however, the meaning of the passage is really ambiguous and indeterminate, we have, it seems to me, two reasons for preferring the interpretation which gives to the revolution the value of 225 days. First, the period of time referred to by two revolutions is then a round number. Twice 225 days is 450 days, or 15 months. Twice 584 days, however, is 1,168 days, or 38 months and 28 days. Even if we take the number as 585 days, and two revolutions are equal to thirty-nine months, Dante's locution would still seem very unnatural. For him to speak of fifteen months as a period of two revolutions of Venus, would, on the other hand, seem less artificial and more plausible. Secondly, if we take the period referred to as thirty-nine months, the whole chronology of this episode becomes incoherent, not to say contradictory (see above, pp. 11-2, 43-4). If, on the other hand, we reckon the period as fifteen months, the date of the first *canzone* of the Convito falls within the limits which the dates of Carlo Martello's visit to Florence and of his death set for it. Under these circumstances it seems to me that we are justified in choosing between the two values of a revolution of Venus, even if, from the point of view of the astronomer, either value would suit Dante's words.